Connecting the Dots in the Service Constellations of the Rural Universe

A Study of the Implementation of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and the Workforce Investment Act in Rural Areas of New York State

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Abstract

This inquiry creates a rural context for thinking about comprehensive service integration in rural areas by identifying the facilitators of and barriers to service integration as they have developed in response to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. Many of the features of service integration and factors influencing the way service integration occurs in rural areas are unknown. With the implementation of the PRWORA and the WIA there is a new impetus to evaluate how the rural community is meeting the needs of its job seekers and employers against the backdrop of new legislation intended to provide universal access to comprehensive services through a coordinated information and service delivery system.

A survey of 42 rural counties in New York State, two case studies, and seven mini-case studies indicate that rurality influences service integration in relation to the role of the organizations' culture and capacity, soft skill development of job seekers, and other services to meet the holistic needs of customers, service delivery, and strategies for overcoming barriers specific to rural areas. Staff capacity creates an invisible infrastructure that transcends specific initiatives, time, levels of funding, economic well-being, and specific needs of individuals living in rural areas and helps to compensates for the lack of infrastructure found in more highly populated areas. The infrastructure consists of strategies for successfully identifying and responding to change and the needs of job seekers and employers who live and work in rural communities.

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I. Introduction

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 require integration of services within and across schools, government agencies, community based organizations, and businesses in an effort to achieve the outcomes of these cross-cutting initiatives. Service integration is the attempt by a variety of agencies with the same customer base to pool their resources in an effort to provide or make referrals to a variety of services needed by the customer. Integrated services are more easily accessible, pro-active in addressing and preventing barriers, and allow service providers to be flexible in meeting all of the customer's needs. There is less fragmentation and delay of services in an integrated system. What facilitates or impedes such a system?

As communities around the nation have started to address and evaluate the issue of service integration within the context of new legislation, many have expressed the need to know more about the factors that influence service integration in rural areas and how to identify and resolve impending barriers. There are several reasons for this current interest: (a) legislation mandates integration; (b) needs of customers are so diverse no one agency possesses the expertise to meet all customer needs and they may require a long-term intervention that some agencies cannot support; (c) the diversity of needs and the variety of agencies serving the same customer makes the referral process within and across agencies and tracking challenging; (d) service providers are recognizing the need to work holistically with the entire family, calling upon expertise the agency may have to secure through other agencies; and (e) barriers such as lack of transportation, child care, and medical insurance remain significant. These issues, spurred to a certain extent by new legislative initiatives, are causing some people in rural areas to worry.

> The implementation of welfare to work in our case study counties is described by program participants and community leaders as proceeding in a "backwards" manner and as insensitive to the needs of individual recipients. The lack of services and real opportunities for training and work combined with sanctions for non-participation have left recipients and social workers alike disillusioned with the reforms and worried about the long term impact. (Harvey and Summers, 2000, pp. 16, 17)

A New Context for Service Integration

The WIA legislation provides the overarching framework in which many initiatives co-exist and, or may be connected. The Workforce Development System (WDS) encompasses and provides a network between the One-Stop and its satellites and agencies who are eligible training providers. Satellites are one of the vehicles that is meant to ensure access to all services by all customers. Satellites may not have all of the services within the physical confines of their agency, but they have the capacity to make appropriate referrals and engage the customer in the system.

Looking at the community through the federal One-Stop initiative and the WIA, one would

see a variety of service provider agencies integrating services to serve a variety of customers referred to by the Act as job seekers and businesses. A subset of job seekers are in-school and out-of-school youth. Each WDS must have a Workforce Investment Board (WIB) appointed by the Chief Elected Official.

According to the federal One-Stop Career Center System Request for Proposal, the One-Stop is the organizing vehicle for transforming the current fragmented array of employment and training programs into a coordinated information and service delivery system for individuals seeking first, new, or better jobs and for businesses seeking to build a world class workforce. The focus of such integration includes a system customized to the particular needs of the local labor market and connected to state and national systems (United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 1996).

> . . . this system is characterized by its emphasis on serving its customers. It should meet the needs of all customers by providing a common core of information and services which are standard and universal at any access point. . . .The system should be easy to locate and use, be information-rich, and offer customers choice in where and how to get services. Finally, this system must be focused on constant improvement by gauging customer satisfaction with services and using the information to improve the system. . . .This system should be flexible, comprised of entities that are learning organizations with staff capable of leading and evolving. This flexible system is also high-tech where technology is used to give and expand high quality services to customers in a variety of manners and media. (United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 1996, p. 1).

The WIA gives customers a choice of service providers and requires providers to document their satisfaction with services and to use that data to improve services across the system. Each local area under the WIA must meet 17 performance measures and ensure customer choice through the use of vouchers for services (U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, 1998). High quality services, then, are determined by the value job seekers and employers place on the services provided and the system's ability to achieve legislated outcomes and expectations of various state and federal agencies.

In order to meet the needs of job seekers and employer customers local communities have begun designing, implementing, and operating integrated WDSs within the context of the One-Stop philosophy. Workforce Development Systems integrate with existing systems developed by education, employment, and training agencies; other service providers; and businesses. The One-Stop Career Center System and the WIA provide an opportunity to integrate services across programs, systems, and agencies for the customers individual agencies have in common.

The local agency responsible for administering welfare benefits is usually involved in the WDS, but is not a mandatory partner. These welfare agencies are required by legislation to provide comprehensive services. The PRWORA establishes a comprehensive welfare reform program.

> This landmark welfare reform legislation dramatically affects not only needy families, but also intergovernmental relationships. It challenges Federal, State, Tribal, and local governments to foster positive changes in the culture of the welfare system and to take more responsibility for program results and outcomes. It transforms the way agencies do business, requiring that they engage in genuine partnerships with each other, businesses, community organizations, and needy families. (United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 1997, pp. 3-4)

Despite the legislative intent, Harvey and Summers state:

> Welfare reform has also brought increased bureaucratization which has made it more difficult to apply for assistance. Caseworkers are instructed to encourage recipients not to use assistance 'if at all possible,' paternity establishment requires obtaining papers from the county attorney's office. (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 19)

Their study included two case studies and a review of census data from four rural areas of the country. Brown quotes Sar Levitan, a labor economist who commented that the coordination of employment and training programs is ". . .an unnatural act between two or more nonconsenting bureaucracies" (Brown, 1997, p. 50). Pines and Callahan caution that with the maturation of welfare legislation integration between agencies may be threatened: "The role of providers of education and employment and training services may differ greatly under welfare reform legislation: The soundest of relationships may be threatened" (Pines and Callahan, 1997, p. 17). Brown states that ". . .typically, the department of social services and providers of employment, education, and training traditionally have different missions, goals, targeting strategies, and accountability standards, and use different kinds of information systems" (Brown, 1997, p. 21). Pines and Callahan, having studied the level of integration demonstrated by School-to-Work, Welfare-to-Work, and One-Stop initiatives, go on to state that ". . .Welfare to Work programs reflect the least amount of joint planning and joint operations of the three efforts studied."

As Harvey and Summers stated in their study on rural areas, the lack of services and real opportunities for training and work combined with sanctions for nonparticipation have left customers and staff disillusioned with the reforms and worried about the long-term impact (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 17). Despite the intent of some legislation and regulations, outcomes may not always be achieved as policymakers envisioned. Service delivery strategies contribute to the means by which outcomes are achieved. What is the means of achieving these outcomes in rural areas?

While federal, state, and local governments increase the number of initiatives to integrate services, it is not know how many areas have integrated these services to provide a high quality, comprehensive, and integrated delivery system leading to improved outcomes for customers.

> While some rural communities in our study had established ways to exchange information among service providers with a goal of achieving greater coordination, none had taken the

> next step of planning for a seamless system. Clearly, eliminating policies that create barriers to pooled funding and service integration is one step. More, better, and more accessible services, ranging from job training to mental health services to basic social services-along with transportation to get there, could enhance the well-being of rural welfare recipients and facilitate their transition from welfare to work. (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt, 2000, p. 17).

Harvey and Summers found an increased emphasis on education, job skills, and student retention, and some increase in interagency planning and coordination, including the integration of nongovernmental organizations such as food pantries and women's shelters: "At the same time, however, interagency coordination was more rhetorical than real as of early 1999" (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 20).

Kogan, having studied collaborations between welfare reform and WDSs through interviews with five public interest groups, though not a rural study, identifies barriers to collaborations between these two systems and the potential for collaboration (Kogan, 1997). Barriers include the stereotypes each system holds of the other, real differences in system goals and priorities, regulatory environments, and accountability principles (Kogan, 1997). Their framework, she states, includes shared objectives, but does not start out with them: "However, to the extent that they share fundamental objectives and serve overlapping customer groups, there is tremendous potential for conducting joint planning and activities to better meet shared mandates" (Kogan, Wolff, Davies, McCarthy, and Martin, 1997, p. 3).

> Welfare customers have the potential to gain improved access to a wide range of self- and guided-access career-related information and services. Workforce development customers have the potential to gain improved access to pre- and post-employment support services and information about providers of additional community resources. Coordinated service design and delivery will support both systems in realizing the capacity to provide improved, more varied, and more comprehensive services to a more diverse customer base than ever before. As a result of the increased flexibility in service planning that may result from coordination between the welfare and Workforce Development Systems, customers may experience improved access to services they need as they enter different stages of career planning or career development. (Kogan, Wolff, Davies, McCarthy, and Martin, 1977, pp. 9, 10)

There is reason to study how these legislative initiatives are implemented in rural areas: "A review of the literature on rural labor markets presents a number of important theoretical issues concerning the study of rural work, workers, and employers and highlights the importance of understanding how welfare systems operate in particular contexts" (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 1).

Now is an opportune time to strengthen rural delivery systems by accessing federal and state resources. In order to determine which factors of service integration apply to rural areas and how facilitators and barriers influence integration, it is necessary to develop a rural context for

thinking about service integration. Kusserow's (1991a) work indicates that organizational networks must be adapted to local environments. Fletcher, in her case study of rural and urban areas of Iowa, identifies a reason for this lack of attention to the rural dimension with citations from others.

> The reasons for this oversight of the rural dimensions of welfare reform are diverse: the invisibility of rural poverty and rural welfare recipients and the erroneous view that poverty is more pervasive in urban than rural areas, the difficulty of addressing a multiplicity of circumstances (rural poverty occurs under more diverse circumstances across communities that is true for urban poverty) coupled with the small absolute number of poor people in rural communities, an urban bias in Federal government agencies such as Health and Human Services and---perhaps equally as important---the view among rural residents that hard work leads to financial success and therefore poverty is an indicator of lack of effort (Vidich and Bensman, 1968). Poverty and welfare status are often seen as due to character flaws (an individual problem) rather than having systemic roots (a social problem) (Ryan, 1972). (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt, 2000, p. 1)

If what we know about service integration may not be applied to rural areas, what factors influence service integration in rural communities? This study examines the potential facilitators of and barriers to service integration in 42 rural counties in New York State. Facilitators are those factors that promote service integration, while barriers include factors that would prevent or reduce the effectiveness of service integration.

This inquiry helps to create a context and a framework for thinking about and developing high quality comprehensive service integration in rural areas by identifying possible facilitators of and barriers to service integration. By sharing these factors, rural areas may utilize the findings to enact legislation, achieve outcomes, meet the needs of customers, and prevent or resolve barriers more effectively. These findings add to the limited knowledge base and subsequent studies will identify the impact of these findings on improving service integration and achieving the outcomes of these legislative initiatives in rural areas.

II. Literature Review

Service Integration Defined

Service integration has been defined as a means of achieving outcomes to the satisfaction of customers and governmental agencies who provide funding.

> Service integration refers primarily to ways of organizing the delivery of services to people at the local level. Service integration is not a new program to be superimposed over existing programs; rather, it is a process aimed at developing an integrated framework within which on-going programs can be rationalized and enriched to do a better job of making services available within existing commitments and resources. Its objectives must include such things

> as: the coordinated delivery of services for the greatest benefit to people; a holistic approach to the individual and the family unit; provision of a comprehensive range of services locally; and rational allocation of resources at the local level so as to be responsive to local needs. (Secretary Elliot Richardson, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, as quoted in Kusserow, 1991a, p. 10)

Some have recognized the concept of integrated services and the need to coordinate human services for over the last 100 years (Soler and Shauffer, 1990). But such recognition has done very little to contribute to the analysis and explanation of efforts undertaken to effectively achieve an integrated service delivery system comprised of a transitional continuum of comprehensive and holistic services that successfully meets the needs of the rural community. These services, when integrated, create a system whereby customers can access the services they need to provide for their personal, educational, and employment related needs and transition from where they are to where they need to be. For example, Fletcher's study noted services from a community college being delivered through neighborhood family resource centers, "consumers of these services acknowledge and appreciate the efforts to integrate services" (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt, 2000, p. 11). Agencies and businesses can also access this system to make referrals, expand existing services, and increase their capacity to achieve their outcomes. Service integration is a means of generating and leveraging the collective capacity of the community to meet these needs through one system.

Developing a Rural Context For Service Integration

The limited knowledge base and lack of agency understanding of rural service integration can be addressed by first identifying what we do know about service integration and rural areas and through the stories of those who provide services and their customers. The features of rural communities include specific attributes of rural areas, specific needs of people living in rural areas, resources and capacity available in rural areas to meet those needs, and services and delivery systems to successfully address those needs. These features frame a specific context for thinking about service integration, one specific to each rural community. Many of these features are well documented in the literature (Coward and Smith, 1983; Sherman, 1992), but when customizing a local delivery system, the community must identify features specific to its area. Most studies have focused on urban settings (Imel, 1994; Kingsley, McNeely, and Gibson, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 1993).

There are two dimensions to the rural context. First there are the features of an area that make it rural. Secondly, there are factors that influence the way in which service integration takes place in rural areas. Which factors influence service integration in rural areas? Do these rural features impact the factors that influence service integration and the delivery of services in rural areas and, if so, how?

The First Dimension of the Rural Context

A Study Across the Community: Features of Rural Areas That May Influence Service Integration: Economic Backdrop

The specific features of a rural community influence how services will be delivered. According to Flora and Flora (1993), it is unlikely that economic growth can occur and be sustained if the social and environmental dimensions of individual and community well-being are not developed. Employment in agriculture began declining in the 1940s. By the 1960s rural areas were in a state of decline. The 1970s were somewhat healthier for rural areas: There was an increase in domestic energy production and farm prices, a movement of routine assembly manufacturing plants to rural areas, and retirees moved back to rural areas (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 4). The transition from the 1970s to the 1980s, however, would mark a lengthy economic struggle for rural areas.

> Growth was accompanied by diversification and the creation of segregated occupational patterns more similar to those of urban areas. It also produced increased incomes, and increased participation among women in the official labor force. The recession of the late 70s and early 80s hit rural areas hard and many have not recovered. This is marked by the internationalizing of the economy. Manufacturing industry started to move to other parts of the world. . .rural areas were slower to recover from the recession and less able to exploit the opportunities of the new globalized economy. . . .Rural unemployment rates peaked. . .there were fewer employment opportunities. . .public sector employment grew in rural areas. . .in rural areas local governments and school systems employ a significant percentage of the labor force and account for a higher proportion of total earnings than in urban areas. (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 5)

The economy of rural areas also appears to influence and be influenced by an informal economy and kin networks of support. Harvey and Summers identify four significant features of the context in which welfare reform, for example, was received in rural areas.

> One, rural labor markets are becoming more dependent on informalized and downgraded service sector work. Two, the restructured work is accompanied by employment hardship in the form of low wages, low hours, and lack of benefits such as sick time and health insurance. Three, the rural poor are 'working poor' who combine the activities of household members in a 'household survival strategy' that is comprised of earnings, unofficial activities, cash, housing, and other forms of in kind assistance from kin, and welfare. Four, compared to the urban workforce there has been a deliberate under-investment in programs to upgrade the rural workforce, and those that have tried, have failed. . . .According to community leaders, when decent jobs do appear competition is fierce and selection between qualified candidates often comes down to 'who knows who.' Also, reflecting the very low educational levels of adults over age 25 in these counties, good positions are also often filled by 'outsiders' with higher qualifications. (Harvey and Summers, 2000, pp. 4, 17)

Tickamyer argues that place is a significant structural factor in labor market outcomes and critiques standard labor market theory for conceptualizing labor markets as if they operated outside of the constraints of time and space (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000). Her case study of Appalachian Ohio included perspectives of both customers and staff informants.

Harvey and Summers and others cite limited research findings on these informal economies and kin networks (Duncan and Sweet, 1992; Fitchen, 1981; Gringeri, 1994; and Nelson and Smith, 1999).

> Qualitative studies indicate that informal activities and kin networks of support are more important components of survival strategies in rural areas than cash welfare assistance. Lack of decent employment opportunities, low welfare payments, strong values of independence and self-sufficiency, and stigmatization of welfare use results in poor rural families engaging in a variety of unofficial activities and reciprocal support among networks of kin. . . . Labor markets in persistently poor rural counties offer workers few incentives to pursue the education and skills training that would assist them in formal labor market participation. Rather, the opportunity structure necessitates engagement in informal activities and self-provisioning at an early age (Harvey and Summers, 2000, pp. 6-7)

"It appears that much of this informal economy consists of microenterprises and, or some form of hunting, fishing, and, or gathering" (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 16). The economy and attributes of people living in rural areas may influence the way services are identified and delivered.

A Study Across the Community: Features of Rural Areas That May Influence Service Integration: *Kinship and Other Attributes of People Living in Rural Areas*

There has been some interest in whether people living in rural areas demonstrate different attributes from people living in urban areas with respect to motivation and self-esteem, independence and self-reliance, reliance on informal and family networks, gender bias, resistance to government intervention, and stigmatization of welfare and whether their needs and how they meet them are influenced by these attributes (Harvey and Summers, 2000). Existing findings are limited, but it is probable that the design of an effective service delivery model in a rural area would be developed, in part, to address these attributes and needs. The current literature on poverty and welfare reform, for example, cite these attributes as they appeared tangential to their studies: They were not the focus of these studies. The exception is work conducted by Cynthia Duncan (1999). Duncan's study looks specifically at families living in rural areas and tells their stories within the context of the area in which they live. What is not available is a correlation between these attributes and the way local areas develop service delivery strategies in an effort to successfully meet the needs of people living in rural areas. It is important, however, to acknowledge the most recent literature that would help identify these attributes and how they may influence service integration in rural communities.

For example, Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson found that program directors blame the Appalachian culture for both promoting and overcoming poverty and diversity. According to their findings, particular vulnerabilities of rural location, political isolation, and regional development issues are concerns when addressing issues in rural communities.

> Themes that emerge from their evaluations of the project range across a very broad litany of practical problems that include assessments of deficits in both individual participant characteristics and local opportunity structure. The former include numerous attitude and character issues attributed to recipients such as lack of work ethic, lack of interest in education, substance abuse, domestic violence, and passive acceptance of 'generational poverty.' (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 8)

Motivation and self-esteem, when increased, can lead to positive outcomes.

> Our interview data shows that most welfare recipients in these areas: a) already do work, b) want to obtain better jobs, c) never received any special employment training or assistance, and d) hold aspirations to complete their educations to build a foundation from which their children may obtain a lot in life better than they have. . . .There also appears to be improved self-esteem for those who have found jobs and increased motivation to obtain education. (Harvey and Summers, 2000, pp. 17, 20)

Harvey and Summer's findings also demonstrate a level of independence and self-reliance.

> These interviews indicate most recipients use welfare either as a temporary source of income maintenance or to supplement inadequate incomes attained through participation in formal and, or informal labor markets. Most families have additional sources of income, often from work in the informal labor markets, and in-kind support from family and friends. (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 16)

Harvey and Summers substantiate these findings with those from Adams and Duncan (1992) and Fitchen (1981), "The rural poor typically go on and off cash assistance as a last resort in situations of unemployment or absence of a male earner" (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 5).

There appears, as Harvey and Summers state, to be an informal economy that exists and part of this economy consists of kinship. Kinship has been briefly explored in works by Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson (2000); Harvey and Summers (2000); Duncan and Sweet (1992); Fitche (1981); Gringeri (1994); and Nelson and Smith (1999). It also appears, according to Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, that kinship is tied to personal responsibility: ". . .what one interviewee said was the 'rural cultural orientation'. . .they are responsible for keeping themselves and their family alive. They just didn't get paid or recognize that as work" (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 9).

Three-fifths of the long-term rural poor stated that they had 'friends or relatives' who could

> provide 'several hundred dollars' more than they had available or could borrow from an institution. An even greater percentage said they had folks they could count on to help out during an emergency. (Adams and Duncan, 1992 in Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 6)

Housing seemed to be the main benefit of this kinship network.

> Housing arrangements and kin networks in poor rural areas constitute an opportunity structure that influences the labor market participation and mobility of household members. Thus in addition to enhancing an understanding of how gender issues relate to poverty and inequality and the different experience of women workers a household analysis is indispensable for understanding how poor rural households employ strategies that pool the resources of family and non-family members to make ends meet. (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 3)

Gender is an attribute that surfaced throughout Harvey and Summers' findings. He goes on to say:

> Taking care of others is, of course, definitive of what is traditionally known as 'women's work.' The gender segregation of labor persists today as women remain highly concentrated in the clerical, health care, food, and domestic service occupations and under-represented in managerial professional occupations. (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 22)

Gringeri (1994) found that local values play a significant role in women's employment opportunities in the communities she studied, as industrial home work is widely seen as providing good secondary jobs for women.

Nelson and Smith (1999) state these networks are not bottomless wells and those that draw too often may be eventually cut off. Ruiz and Tiano (1987) and Nelson and Smith (1999) state these kinship networks are grounded in reciprocal obligations. Reliance on these networks and reciprocal relationships may be reasons why people in rural areas are unwilling to move to more highly populated areas where jobs may be more plentiful, pay more, and, or provide better benefits and opportunities for advancement.

> . . .there is a general perception among the rural welfare recipients in the study that there are no jobs in their communities that will pay them a living wage. Good jobs are in the bigger towns and that requires reliable personal transportation. (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt, 2000, p.10)

While the economy of adjacent areas may be healthier, moving from a rural area to an urban or suburban area to find work may cause a loss of this informal support system.

> In general, job opportunities for residents of adjacent rural counties are undoubtedly greater than for those living in counties not adjacent to a metro county, if the worker is able and

> willing to commute to the metro areas. . . .Whereas rural families with adequate resources often can overcome many of the constraints of rural communities, those who are faced with the challenge of moving from welfare to work often find the distances to jobs and lack of support services to be serious barriers. (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt, 2000, pp. 5, 15)

Harvey and Summers' findings share that many rural residents would prefer to commute over 70 miles one way each day rather than leave the area and their family support network. Moving suggests there may be new issues to resolve, whereas staying means resolving existing issues. Service integration can help maximize the resources available and help individuals and rural communities overcome many of these contextual features.

The Delivery System: Program Outcomes Based upon Community Needs

Service integration exists to meet the needs of the members of a community. Meeting these needs becomes the outcome or result to be achieved by various schools, human service agencies, governments, and businesses. Morrill and Gerry (1990) found that the sharing and avoidance of duplication arising from integration and coordination leads to improved efficiency, access to and use of needed services, cost reduction, and, as a result, improved life outcomes. The greater the continuum and integration of services, the more holistic and effective the services will be in meeting the needs of the members to their satisfaction.

By combining the visions, outcomes, and scarce resources of a community, the results will be a greater capacity to meet the needs of customers and government.

> Collaboration implies a willingness on the part of organizations to change the way services are delivered by: Jointly developing and agreeing to a set of common goals and directions, sharing responsibility for obtaining those goals, and working together to achieve those goals, using the expertise of each collaborator. (Bruner, 1991, p. 6)

Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt state, "Finally, findings from our study have implications for service delivery in rural communities. Exploring ways to remove the disadvantages inherent in the set of support services currently available in rural communities will not be easy" (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt, 2000, p. 17). According to Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt's study, none had taken the next step of planning for a seamless system.

Leadership and Organizational Capacity

Leadership is key to achieving outcomes and maximizing resources. According to Melaville and Blank (1991) the visions, commitment, and competence of the people who lead, participate, and implement programs are variables that shape partnerships. Competition to achieve numbers, quotas, participation rates, and targets can stand in the way of a truly collaborative service

delivery continuum when many of the same agencies provide services to the same few customers. The role of leader can just as easily become that of pirate. Community collaboration requires joint trust, accountability, and commitment to a common goal or outcome. Miller (1995), in his research with the Community Development Partnership, finds that vision and consensus building activities unite the community in action.

Legislation, according to Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson's study, has influenced leadership and the way agencies work.

> . . .the strongest and most consistent theme running through most of the interviews was the idea that welfare reform provides increased flexibility for them and their agencies. This was expressed in a variety of ways from describing particular program innovations that they had implemented to larger philosophical statements about the changing nature of the agencies, the new ways they would have to serve customers, and the new populations they might serve. Directors praised the end of a cookie cutter approach and were particularly enthusiastic about the reduction of rule-oriented procedures. (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 11).

Devolution, increased flexibility on a local level, and increased funding do not necessarily make it easier to provide leadership according to an informant in Tickamyer's study.

> Flexibility brings its own problems, however: 'But my biggest program is. . . .I know that there's all these things out there that all these counties are doing and you know the county flexibility is great but trying to keep up with everybody else is doing. . .and what's working for them.' Money was tied to flexibility in that the directors stated that they finally have enough money to do what they need to. Using the money was sometimes seen as problematic, however. 'I guess the big problem we've had here is cash flow because we have to spend the money before we get the money.' (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 12)

According to Melaville and Blank (1991, p. 20), "The most supportive climate is one in which a problem with multiple causes and consequences. . . is a top priority of the community, key decision makers, and service providers, and where previously established working relationships exist among potential partners."

Needs and Accountability

The agencies providing services must work in an efficient, supportive environment and build the capacity necessary to successfully identify and respond to the needs of the community. Owen's qualitative study throughout urban and rural areas of Minnesota suggests:

> . . .local partnerships between employers, government, and social service providers can help make welfare reform successful. . .These ends can best be met if all the partners agree on

> clear and consistent goals that include genuine efforts to understand and meet employers' needs, and if social service providers are prepared to commit to on-going support services for welfare recipients after they are hired. (Owen, 2000, p. i)

In a study conducted by the New York State Departments of Labor, Education, and Social Services, now referred to as the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, service providers indicated that intra- and interagency program characteristics essential to program success include a customer and performance-driven approach and cooperative relationships within and external to their agencies (Bender, 1996). These agencies are outcome-driven and design services in direct relation to those necessary to achieve outcomes identified by their customers.

This customer focus leads to continuous improvement, customer satisfaction, and demonstration of a return on investment, and is based upon effective communication, optimum use of technology, and a variety of working relationships within and across agencies. This may not always be the reality.

> The larger policy calls on recipients to take responsibility for their lives, to move away from a system of dependency to one of self-sufficiency, yet programs are designed in a highly paternalistic fashion, and the general assumption is that customers are not capable of making judgments or decisions for themselves, but instead interventions must be designed to 'lead them by the hand.' Although agencies will work intensively with clients to deal with their problems, it does not occur to directors to solicit participant views or to include them in planning efforts to determine how to design and implement reform programs. Interestingly enough, many directors do recognize that successful welfare reform must be a community wide effort. They discuss the responsibilities of county officials, local employers, and the public at large. They speak proudly of the mobilization of their communities behind the planning process that represented the first stage of their efforts. They know there are few quick fixes, and while they are optimistic and appreciative of some of the aspects of welfare reform, they are realistic enough to know that the larger issues take a community effort, at the very least. (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 14)

Harvey and Summers' work, conducted in rural areas including Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities, indicates that some staff involved in implementing new legislation are more concerned with implementation than with meeting the needs of the people for whom the legislation is intended, including the need for child and elder care and transportation.

> Little attention has been given to provision of local services which recipients say are lacking . . . .There is a variety of reasons for this, including historical under investment in job assistance programs, lack of infrastructure, and in some counties, the persistence of traditional gender roles in which women are expected to stay home and take care of children and the elderly. Lack of services also stems, however, from the approach that local administrators have taken to meet their responsibilities under the reforms. Local administrators appear to have pursued four basic strategies: a) a focus on the long-term goal

> of community economic development; (b) concern, in the short-term, with finding unpaid voluntary work placements so that mandated participants can maintain TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] eligibility; (c) efforts to move participants to other regions where demand for low skill labor is high; and (d) reliance on increased surveillance and sanctioning to obtain participation among mandated recipients in the absence of the positive incentive of a good job. Little attention has been given to provision of local services which recipients say are lacking. (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 17)

Harvey and Summers state that the appearance of many organizations have changed, but are uncertain about their perceptions.

> In theory, the role of the TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] office, which is now referred to as a 'job center' rather than a welfare office, is to 'help the applicant get a job—any job.' The reality, however, is that most participants who were placed in employment through TANF have not been offered post-employment services because such services simply are not available. (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 18)

This brings about a discussion as to whether or not an agency chooses to describe the environment in relation to the customer or describe the customer's characteristics in relation to the environment.

> The literature on labor market outcomes may be separated into two basic theoretical camps, that of human capital versus structural constraints. Human capital is usually emphasized in neoclassical economic theories positing that individual attributes such as level of education and work experience are the primary explanatory factors in determining labor market outcomes. The decisions made by rational utility maximizing individuals regarding human capital investments are considered the key to their future economic well-being. The structural approach is associated with institutionalist economics and economic sociology. It looks beyond the characteristics of individuals to the context in which human capital is acquired and exercised. Thus external factors such as the local opportunity structure, the demand for labor in the local market and the types of jobs available, are the privileged explanatory variables. . . .Each theory has its advantages and liabilities. The strength of human capital theory is the emphasis it places on individual autonomy and decision making. Its weakness is its failure to investigate the social processes through which certain skills and attributes become valued as human capital and inequitably distributed among various groups and classes of individuals. The strength of the structural approach is that it recognizes the importance of the social processes and institutions that human capital theory overlooks. Its weakness is that in emphasizing structure it often overlooks the agency of individual actors and posits overly deterministic models. (Granovetter, 1985). Lobao (1993) reminds structuralists that sufficient attention must be paid to agency and that human capital and the bargaining processes that occur between employers and employees must be re-thought in light of structural constraints. There is consensus in the literature on rural labor markets that labor market analysis cannot be captured by any single theory (Harvey and Summers, 2000,

p. 2).

Danzinger looks at human capital as being education, labor force skills, and previous work experience and as separate from "mental and physical health problems, access to automobiles, perceptions of previous experiences of discrimination, and other psychosocial and familial attributes" (Danzinger, 2000, p. 9). This study conducted by Danzinger analyzed a variety of data and included interviews with job seekers. Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson (2000) and Tickamyer and Bokemeir (1993) assume that rural labor markets differ from urban to the extent that inequality of experience is systematically affected. Lobao (1993) also stresses the importance of spatial analysis, noting that studies of local labor markets have shown the organization of economic production has developed unevenly over space and time resulting in different contexts of opportunity and variations by place. Traditionally, legislation that supported agencies such as local Departments of Social Services and schools have created systems based upon the human capital theory. Welfare reform has transitioned local Departments of Social Services from the human capital theory to labor market attachment, or what is termed here as the structural approach.

It is possible for a delivery system to be developed without considering the needs of the customer. For example, Owen (2000) found that employers identified lack of soft skills as the primary barrier to workforce participation, while welfare recipients themselves cited structural problems such as low wages and lack of education and child care as their primary obstacles to self-sufficiency.

> The key to DHS [Department of Human Services] directors views lies more in their response to organizational changes and mandates of welfare reform than their assessment of prospects for success or failure at the level of clients and program participants. Perhaps, not surprisingly for administrators of large agencies (they vary from under 50 to close to 200 employees), their concerns are much more focused on how welfare reform is organized, managed, and implemented than on the clientele that it serves. Both in spontaneous remarks and in response to interview questions, directors were most likely to bring up issues that affect their organizations, their jobs, and their resources. '. . .you know you're more of a social worker now and you don't really focus so much on getting a person a check. . .but you're doing a lot of this other hand holding and mentoring with the people.' (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 11)

Harvey found that child care was the number one reason for people leaving their jobs: "Lack of child care was the primary reason given by recipients for non-participation in work and work activities" (Harvey and Summers, 2000, p. 19). When agencies say they identify services and build delivery systems based upon the needs of their constituents, is it the needs of the individuals as articulated by them or as perceived by staff? Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson found that transportation was the only issue accorded an equal level of concern by both staff and recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

> A couple of directors echo recipient predictions of social problems and unrest in the event of economic downturn, but these are the exceptions and even among these, concerns focus more on problems for administrators (security of the agency and increased caseloads for agencies and courts rather than recipients). (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 9)

Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson's study indicates:

> The perspectives of both welfare recipients and directors illustrate the underlying contradictions in the way policy is politically justified and implemented and the particular problems that face rural areas to demonstrate the disparities between the 'top-down' goals of welfare policy and the 'bottom-up' perceptions of their outcomes. (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 4)

It appears identification of the true need is important if it is to be addressed successfully. Results of Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson's study indicate that welfare managers had a favorable attitude about the purpose and goals of the PRWORA, though not necessarily its outcome.

> The real problems facing both program participants and their human service agencies are: Individualized attribution of blame along the lines of culture of poverty explanations, contrasted with recognition of structural barriers, particularly characteristics of their poor rural counties and the region. (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 6)

There is evidence, then, that an agency's philosophy of human capital versus a structural approach could also influence the way an agency identifies and designs a service delivery strategy.

> Even directors who are most cognizant of the lack of living wage jobs, poor prospects for economic development, and failures of investment in infrastructure and institution building in their rural communities, resort to a moral analysis that emphasizes the individual's personal problems by differentiating between the potentially successful verses the bottom 20%. (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 10)

As Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson (2000) documented, program directors, while aware of structural barriers, were unable to do anything about them. As a result, long-range prospects in rural areas were seen as grim and resolutions constructed as interventions as opposed to issues typically addressed by large, well-funded, and politically-supported infrastructures of more highly populated areas.

> They are well aware of many of the barriers their clients face and are often deeply pessimistic about long-range prospects given their rural location, lack of jobs, lack of infrastructure, and lack of political interest on the part of policy makers to address these issues. This knowledge is contradicted by their actions, however, which are oriented toward fixing the individual

> problems that clients face. Interventions are designed to make participants 'work ready.' Much of it is focused on instilling work discipline from knowing how to get up on time to proper dress and hygiene. To be fair, directors' hands are tied in this respect. They have the ability to make individual interventions rather than structural changes. Thus they are constrained to address even large scale structural problems on an individual basis, case by case. For example, the large and pervasive problem of transportation which affects virtually every county and most program participants can only be dealt with by band aid interventions of small loans for vehicle purchase or repair, provision of temporary or emergency taxi and shuttle services, or worst case, threats and sanctions with little backup assistance. Directors are all too aware that they are dealing with a larger structural issue, endemic to the region, but it is beyond their power to do anything at this level. (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 13)

Under the WIA, customers will have the opportunity to rate their level of satisfaction with the type and level of services provided. It would make sense to develop a system based upon what customers say they need and what they identify as the best mechanisms for service delivery. This new level of accountability will help link service delivery to customer need. To what extent does the economy, leadership, and lack of infrastructure influence service integration in rural areas?

The Second Dimension of the Rural Context

The Inquiry: *Factors That Influence Service Integration in Rural Areas*

How are the factors of service integration influenced by elements of rurality? While the literature identifies characteristics of effective service integration, their applicability to rural areas is unknown. The research of Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt addresses this issue.

> While the problems appear to be universal, solutions may be different for urban and rural communities. The most important differences that manifested themselves along the rural-urban continuum were related to accessibility and distance to jobs and support services. Rural welfare-recipient families transitioning from welfare to work encountered fewer services locally. When services were available locally, access was less frequent. This pattern was particularly notable with respect to accessibility of jobs, job training and education, health care, child care, and emergency services. (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt, 2000, p. 2)

There is a lack of infrastructure and economic development related to rural location, isolation, and regional development issues.

> As a consequence of these structural features of the economy, rural residents often face an underdeveloped infrastructure of support for employment even when there are jobs. Everything from the difficulty of travel in these areas, to the absence of child care can be included as obstacles to employment. In light of this, we can expect that the impact of

> welfare reform, and specifically of welfare-to-work programs will be very different in the rural context than in the contemporary urban context. We can expect that the needs of welfare-to-work participants will also differ as will the capacities of human service agencies to manage welfare reform. (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 4)

Given the lack of infrastructure there is a greater need to coordinate the services and resources that do exist. Poor educational facilities, inadequacy of emergency services, and lack of living wage jobs and health and child care are all reflections of the lack of infrastructure and the systemic barriers that need to be identified (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000 and Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt, 2000). There is a need for better interagency coordination (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt, 2000). Not only does it take longer for people to access and receive services, there are less services and expertise to access.

> Low income residents of rural counties often experience difficulty with both availability of and access to adequate health care. Often the issue of availability is simply whether there are any physicians, mental health professionals, dentists, or family planning facilities at all. In rural towns, the availability involves whether or not anyone in the county is accepting Medicaid, how often the services are available, and, if there are no services, how far residents will need to travel in order to procure health services. (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt, 2000, p. 12)

O'Looney adds, ". . . rural social service providers have tended neither to have the skills nor the resource capacity to treat the specific ills of those who have been identified as needy or troubled" (O'Looney, 1992, p. 3).

> In short, programs aimed at improving the employment opportunities of the rural workforce have been largely ineffective due to a lack of interest on the part of employers related to their demand for unskilled labor, a lack of supportive services and infrastructure, and systematic under-investment in education and human capital development. (Deavers and Hoppe, 1992, p. 11)

Based upon population disbursement, rural areas may receive a disproportionately smaller percentage of the nation's social service funding (Logan, 1992, p.23). According to Myers-Walls (1992), there are "no economies of scale" for rural areas. Guthrie and Scott summarize such uniqueness:

> Rural communities often lack the variety and quality of services found in cities and are seldom equipped to meet the various special needs that only small numbers of children might have. Long distances, limited public transportation, and inadequate roads limit coordination among agencies as well as client's access to services. Attracting and retaining qualified professional staff often is a problem. (Guthrie and Scott, 1992, p. 3)

Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt (2000) indicate that availability of services may be

predicated upon type and number of staff in the region. Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, in a more recent study, confirm Guthrie and Scott's findings:

> Rural communities lack the advantages of metropolitan areas that can attract new investment; rural areas cannot achieve the same economies of scale in delivering social services for education and training, child care and transportation; and they generally lack access to capital and credit for job creation. Rural areas also have significant numbers of 'working poor,' people who are employed, but working part time or in low wage jobs that provide few if any benefits. (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 4)

Proximity of jobs and access to support services suggest differential effects of welfare reform policies.

> Urban centers offer more job opportunities and support a scale of auxiliary social services that cannot be matched in rural communities. Our data suggest that welfare recipients who live in or adjacent to urban areas have potential access to more jobs, and jobs that pay higher wages compared to recipients who live in remote rural communities. . . .The greater the population density, the likelihood of mass transit systems. . . .Families making the transition from welfare to work need an array of support services that may include job training, health care, child care, or a range of emergency services. Our interviews with welfare families and community informants suggest that increasing the accessibility and quality of these services will likely enhance family well-being and the ability of families to move toward self-sufficiency. (Fletcher, Flora, Gaddis, Winter, and Litt, 2000, p.15)

Barriers have been identified in previous studies of urban areas.

Despite these seemingly negative barriers, O'Looney (1993) believes rural service providers tend to model many of the characteristics fostering or facilitating service integration, and such efforts are more effective including worker flexibility, greater closeness and collaboration between workers and citizens in need and that they are culturally sensitive, universal access, and comprehensive and nonstigmatizing services.

Factors, both facilitators and barriers, could be interchangeable. For example, lack of access could be perceived as a barrier to service integration. It may also be possible for the lack of access to be the facilitator that brings people together to talk about common needs and goals. Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson talk about rural location, political isolation, and regional development issues as being issues that may be perceived as both barriers and facilitators.

> Recipients are blamed for lacking a work ethic, being 'generationally' welfare dependent, suffering personal deficits in motivation and education, and being victim and perpetrator of a variety of abuses from substance to domestic violence. At the same time, directors are quick to recognize strengths in their clients that show up in the face of structural adversity,

> including lack of jobs and all the support services necessary to be able to maintain steady employment, from lack of transportation to lack of teeth. . . .In other words, the same director will blame Appalachian culture both for promoting and overcoming poverty and adversity, criticize recipients for their personal problems, and simultaneously acknowledge structural barriers. These are not seen as either, or phenomena, but rather are rolled into sometimes contradictory, generally more complex, multilayered views. These views mirror the larger policy and academic debates about individual cultural and structural approaches to explaining welfare use, except that they are not held as alternative views but are held concurrently. (Tickamyer, White, Tadlock, and Henderson, 2000, p. 8)

This inquiry endeavored to explore all of the potential facilitators helping to foster, develop, and maintain service integration and the barriers that would prevent or impede comprehensive service integration in rural areas. By explaining the rural context for these factors and providing a rural framework, other rural areas may be able to seek out and utilize the facilitators necessary and eliminate or resolve barriers more effectively and efficiently in an effort to enact legislation; achieve outcomes; meet the needs of children, families, and businesses; and prevent or resolve barriers effectively. With federal initiatives such as the PRWORA and the WIA, there is new impetus for communities to engage or re-engage in an inquiry on service integration.

III. Methodology

A Three-Phase Study: Phase One

In order to identify factors that may represent facilitators and barriers that influence comprehensive, integrated service delivery systems in rural areas a three-phase study was conducted of the 42 rural counties in New York State (see Figure 1). The first phase of the study consisted of a survey to identify facilitators and barriers in rural areas. There was no sample set given the inquiry engaged each of the 42 rural counties in New York State and a variety of agencies in each county. The designation of rural came from the New York State Legislature: They have identified 42 counties as being rural based upon population density. Categories of focus in the survey were attributes of rural areas; funding; outside influences; needs of individuals living in rural areas; organizational features and accountability of agencies that provide services; the types, quality, and variety of services; service coordination; service delivery; and characteristics of staff. There were 65 factors related to the categories of focus. Survey respondents identified the factors as facilitators of and, or barriers to service integration. A multivariate analysis was conducted of the factors. An univariate analysis allowed the examination of the distribution of responses on one factor at a time. The results are reported in the form of summary averages or measures of central tendency. Other univariate analyses were demonstrated through percentages. Each rural county was asked to participate in the study and to identify other people that should be involved. Each one of the 42 counties responded with at least one person to contact in their agency (N=42). There was a 100 percent response rate. There was a 97.6 percent response rate from key individuals (N=41). There was an 87 percent response

rate from agencies referred by the key individuals (N=61). An additional 28 surveys were completed from respondents referred by state level staff or through other means (N=130).

Phase Two

The second phase of this study consisted of a multiple case and multiple site design consisting of interviews with respondents from the survey in phase one and collection and analysis of various documents from several counties. Interviews with 123 staff and job seeker and employer customers were utilized to clarify the data from the survey and provide the additional context necessary to further develop the emerging framework. This phase was descriptive, but primarily explanatory in nature as the study needed to reveal something about how the individual factors influence service integration throughout the system it represents.

Two case studies and five mini-case studies were conducted with the most intensive case study taking place over a ten month period. Observation, interviews, and data collection was conducted on-site and through the mail. Interviews were also conducted via telephone. It appeared that studying service integration can be enhanced by experiencing it firsthand in the field, by literally seeing the reality and results of service integration as it is experienced in rural communities.

Phase Three

Phase three consisted of further data collection and verification of the findings by sharing the data with agencies involved in the inquiry. The findings were shared and further explored through regional forums, interviews, and analysis of relevant documents. The results of the inquiry led to a rural context for evaluating service integration against the backdrop of the PRWORA and the WIA and replicable strategies to be utilized while developing or improving service integration in rural areas.

This three-phase approach allowed me to identify the potential factors related to service integration; factors potentially relevant to rural areas; the continuum upon which they impact rural service integration in the first phase; and the significance of the factors through phases two and three.

IV. Overview of Findings and Implications

A Framework for Understanding Service Integration in Rural Areas: Secrets to Success

This inquiry was an attempt to discover the facilitators of and barriers to service integration in rural areas, or as one informant referenced as service constellations. Service integration includes the act of connecting and integrating services in a sequence relevant to the customer's needs and ensuring that the services are accessible and effective. Based upon the results of the

survey and interviews, of the nine categories of focus, rurality was the most highly ranked facilitator of and barrier to service integration as identified in Table 1. It appears that features of rurality have the greatest influence on service integration as demonstrated by informants and respondents: An overview of this influence can be found in Table 2. Factors related to rurality included the status of the economy and unemployment levels, geographic isolation, and access to services. The second most positive influence on service integration was staff. Factors related to staff included commitment, flexibility, leadership, and influence of government intervention and regulations on staff behavior as demonstrated in Table 3. The second highest barrier was funding. Limited resources are further compounded by low population density and the high number of people needing a variety of services (see Table 4.) Factors related to funding were high cost of service delivery, categorical funding, and funding uncertainties. A survey informant explains.

> Rural counties often lack the capacity to identify potentially eligible individuals, or lack sufficient number of clients to make it economically feasible to compete for funding performance based program models. Rural areas do not have sufficient number of low-income clients that make it feasible to operate those [programs] that are performance based.

The most highly ranked barriers to service integration are included in Table 5.

As the study progressed, themes across initiatives and counties emerged. While themes emerged, what became apparent is that each rural area is unique. It would be overlooking important factors that influence success if one were to try to qualify all rural areas the same way. This raised the issue of applicability of the findings to other rural areas. The intent behind this research is for others to better understand the factors, how they influence service integration, and possibly apply or test the findings in their rural counties. After discovering how unique rural areas are and the needs of the customers they serve, it seemed at first there may be very little of this inquiry relevant to a specific rural area, a phenomena for which Kussarow (1991a) and Tickamyer (2002) both caution. As a result of this consternation and an interview with an informant who described “moveable concepts” and “art forms” for replication, it seemed necessary and possible to analyze themes and variations on the factors that began to appear across rural counties in New York State in an effort to identify what, if any, meaning could be utilized by other rural areas.

Prior to developing such an understanding there were several lessons to learn. First, service integration is a means to an end and not an end unto itself. Service integration in rural areas appears to be the result of agencies which recognize they can better meet customer needs by working with other agencies to successfully identify and respond to the needs. This recognition appears to be more self-initiated by leadership and staff than a response to the WIA legislation, while the PRWORA had served as a direct catalyst for change. It seems the lack of infrastructure in rural areas and low population density make it impossible for any one agency to meet the diverse needs of customers. As a result, agencies pool their resources and expertise to provide an integrated and comprehensive support system that otherwise would not exist. This is consistent

with the findings of Kogan (1997), Fletcher (2000), and Sussman (2000) who state that access, expertise, and support can be improved by service integration in rural communities that lack the infrastructure of more highly populated areas. The characteristics of the infrastructure observed and described by informants and respondents were similar to those identified and examined by Harvey (2000), Tickamyer (2000), Deavers and Hoppe (1992), Guthrie and Scott (1992), and Fletcher (2000). Staff appear to be the critical element, as they are instrumental in connecting the dots between agencies in the job seeker's service constellation. It was necessary to investigate the context in which service integration functions.

Secondly, successful and sustained service integration appears to emanate from an agency's culture. While it was not the purpose of this inquiry to investigate the role of culture or change, it was apparent from the survey results and informants that culture influences staff and staff influence the factors of service integration. If the culture of the organization is influenced by customer needs and if the most effective way to respond to customer needs is through service integration, then service integration is perceived as a valuable component of an agency's culture Survey respondents identified a variety of factors and permutations of factors that drive organizations as demonstrated in Table 6. Studies by Tickamyer (2000) and Harvey (2000) indicate that customer needs as demonstrated and, or articulated by customers did not influence how staff responded to their needs. Their studies do indicate that motivation and self-esteem are customer characteristics important to improve, as evidenced in this study. It appears that self-esteem and motivation are the underlying tenets of success. An informant shares that reaching self-sufficiency takes more than a job.

> These people are in a chronic crisis. Their utilities are shut off and their situation is not immediately ameliorated when they go to work. Their benefits are not continued long enough. Their circumstances don't improve dramatically by getting these minimum wage jobs. They need to feel better about themselves.

Customer needs and the influence of kinship on customers were not direct interests of this inquiry; however, given that service integration is a strategy to meet customer needs, it appeared necessary to understand their influence. An informant explains.

> Family support is critical. With the number of cases where there is a kinship opportunity, take it. Do a personal inventory. Look at the whole continuum, positive things they have. It is a fact of life for everyone. . . .Blood is thicker than water. Family is critical. . . .Look at their strengths. They recognize that someone cares about them. They have bruised egos. Don't miss the opportunity to have a positive relationship. You have to develop trust from the start. Dwelling on the negative prolongs building trust.

Relationships and commitment with other agencies progress as a means to meet customer needs. Owen's (2000) study reveals information on staff commitment and O'Looney (1993) identified characteristics of staff in rural areas that foster service integration that appears to consistent with these findings. It became necessary to better understand the apparent corollary between agency

culture and service integration.

Thirdly, it appears the type and level of service integration between agencies varies over time and space. A specific initiative, need, or funding strategy may serve to couple four or five agencies for a period of time. At the same time, two or three of those agencies may be coupled with a different group of agencies for another initiative, as described by Weick (1976). If a service is located in a particular area, agencies located in that area may be included where they would not be with an initiative located elsewhere. It does appear, however, that there is a central core of agencies which share customers, values, outcomes, and direction and that these core of agencies integrate services as demonstrated in the web for Counties A, B, and C (Figures 2, 3, and 4, respectively). It also appears, given the wide range of survey respondents, that the factors identified in the survey have implications for service integration across agencies and are not limited to any one coupled group. What was being studied appears to be a very fluid and informal system with multiple permutations and relationships at any given time. The limited literature on service integration does not appear to have identified the differences between different types of systems, nor relationships in service integration in rural or urban areas. It appears the WIA would make this system less fluid and informal by requiring provider agencies to stipulate the elements of their relationship in a time-limited Memorandum of Understanding: One county included in the case studies maintained their fluid and informal system. Another county, complying with the legislation, lost many of the underlying successful characteristics of the positive relationships they had formed over the previous ten years. The WIA did not require agencies to assess their current level of coordination, capacity, strengths, and weaknesses. Instead, some of the counties in the study regressed with respect to the type and quality of relationships that had existed prior to the passage of the act.

Fourthly, it appears that despite the level of service integration, there is no county void of existing and, or potential saboteurs. It appears necessary to recognize these and other barriers and how agencies deal with them effectively. While seemingly important in the case studies, the literature regarding rural areas and service integration has done little to address the influence of saboteurs.

Fifthly, survey respondents and informants identified factors other than those in the survey. These factors had to be considered for their level of influence and meaning. These factors included more specific detail about staff characteristics and the culture and capacity of the agency. For example, both respondents and informants stated how difficult it is to maintain staff.

> So in our own department we have more awareness training to do and we are doing this it is just that we keep losing staff. Every time someone leaves, we have to educate them again . . . .I don’t drink beer, but if I did, I would be crying in it. We can’t keep staff.

Informants provided multiple dimensions to the meaning of both facilitators of and barriers to service integration in rural areas. It appears each informant has a similar rural context, but variations of the factors and their level of influence were identified. The survey only provided

respondents with the opportunity to identify the "bones" of service integration. It was possible for informants to describe the inner workings, the heart, mind, soul, and veins of service integration as it exists in each rural county through interviews and observations at meetings, workshops, and other events.

Sixthly, the concept of rural took on different meanings across the state. People in the southern part of the state sometimes categorically referred to the rest of the state as rural. Informants living in less populated areas referred to lesser populated areas as rural. Informants rarely uttered the word rural. They appeared more likely to refer to another place as rural if they lived or worked in a more highly populated area, while those living in rural areas were less likely to make the distinction. As noted, rurality was more a way of life than a site on a map. For this reason the findings of this study also need to be considered for their relationship to people rather than just place, which may give the results wider implications. The characteristics of staff, customers, and their relationships appear to be core features of the factors of service integration in rural areas.

Based upon the insight gained by respondents and informants, it is possible to evaluate the themes and variations that emerged within a rural context and identify replicable concepts. What can be replicated are moveable concepts, as termed by an informant. As this informant states, "how they are moved is an art form;" something that cannot be replicated, but that should be customized for each agency and WDS within their own unique rural context.

It appears that part of the art form of moving concepts may be influenced by the agency's culture and the characteristics of staff. Staff who value the customer, respect their resources, and are creative and experimental may develop different art forms or responses to legislation than agencies driven by outcomes or legislation. According to the informant, the act of replication is more craft or skill than a scientific method in rural areas. Cultures which support risk-taking, creativity, and experimentation appear to understand how best to utilize data in a way that will be effective in rural areas. A context for understanding service integration in rural areas emerged as a result of the findings, as did insight into how to utilize the findings across rural areas that appear to differ greatly from one another.

The Context: Identifying the Symptoms of Rurality

There is a context in which to study issues, practices, and strategies as they relate to service integration in rural areas. It is apparent from the survey data that rurality has a great influence on whether the goals of an agency, customer, and legislation can be achieved and, perhaps more importantly, how they are achieved. Employment opportunities are limited in the majority of rural areas of this study and other studies by Danzinger (2000), Flora and Flora (1993), and Harvey and Sumners (2000). An informant echos what the majority of survey respondents stated: ". . . .Most employment is minimum or near minimum wage. Not enough modern technology based industries that pay enough for a wage earner to support a family."

In addition to employment opportunities, other characteristics of rural areas are similar to those found in these and other studies by Fletcher (2000), Tickamyer (2000), and Guthrie and Scott (1991). It appears rurality necessitates the need for transportation and the availability of transportation affects whether or not customers can participate in work activities and maintain employment. The usage of public transportation in the 42 rural counties is identified in Table 7. It also appears the level and quality of services and staffing in rural areas is not adequate to meet current needs due to the inability to secure adequate funding, attract knowledgeable staff, and provide competitive salaries. A respondent explains.

> We do not receive adequate levels of financial support from NYS [New York State] to pay equitable levels of compensation, benefits. This results in high staff turnover. There are levels of bureaucracy and inefficiency that have resulted in the delay of starting programs and in our receiving funding. There is little that local agencies can do other than advocate for change. When we do, it is resented.

Additional funding is needed to meet the existing needs of customers who are the hardest-to-serve and need individualized assistance or who are at risk. It is a challenge to effectively deliver services to customers who live in remote areas. There may be no critical mass of people to serve in a single area and, or no centralized location where customers can assemble to access services. An informant explains.

> We have three more populated areas and [she laughed] all of them are under 5,000 people. Then there is the rest of the county. There are not central population bases. You have the western part of the county with these three highly populated areas and then you have nothing. Now do you see why people have to drive out of the county for work? Even if you lived near these places, there would not be enough jobs.

Low population density, fewer employment opportunities, and inadequate resources are influenced by the infrastructure of rural areas.

The Invisible Infrastructure in Rural Communities: It Is Strong and Healthy

Having learned more about the rural context of service integration, it was apparent the infrastructure in rural areas is not and may never be capable of creating the capacity necessary to overcome all of the issues associated with rurality. The issues and strategies identified by informants and respondents are included in Table 8. To conclude from this inquiry that the greatest barriers to service integration or meeting customer needs is funding for specific initiatives such as transportation and child care not only underestimates the problem, but misrepresents the problem as it can be addressed in rural areas. There is not enough funding available to provide the type of infrastructure necessary in each rural community to provide the access, quality, and variety of services available in more highly populated areas. The literature does not identify a viable alternative, nor does it recognize staff as a vehicle to improve the infrastructure in rural areas. Without the infrastructure of more populated areas, how can

customer needs be addressed successfully?

From survey data I learned of many barriers associated with living and delivering services in rural areas. Rural areas may be limited and enriched by the rural environment in which customer needs must be addressed: These may be concurrent forces as demonstrated by the findings of this inquiry and those of Tickamyer (2000). Rural areas appear to lack an infrastructure in which to invest. To simply invest money in a single agency for a transportation initiative that impacts less than a quarter of a percent of the population is merely addressing the symptoms of rurality: It is not a cure. To think the infrastructure in rural areas could be so significantly impacted by current appropriations as to overcome the barriers of rurality would be short-sighted, if not unrealistic. If the infrastructure in rural areas cannot be impacted successfully, how can the issues related to customer need and service integration be resolved? The answer is to address them as only they can be addressed in rural areas, "one person at a time," through a systemic change in which organizations identify and respond to the needs of people living in rural areas by exhausting and integrating all plausible resources and permutations of those resources. Invisible to many looking in from the outside, this infrastructure is built on values, customer needs, and the characteristics of staff who partner with other agencies to maximize their collective capacity to facilitate customer outcomes. The infrastructure also includes the personal attributes of the customer and the resources he or she can access.

Invest in Resolving the Problem, Not the Symptoms

From staff, customers, employers, and others interviewed it was learned there is another type of infrastructure in many of the rural communities involved in this study. This infrastructure, while not built of brick and mortar, represents one of the foundations upon which rural areas have built their success. To truly impact rural areas, to create a systemic change that will serve as the foundation for not only changes brought about by the PRWORA and the WIA, but life after these reforms, it appears necessary to invest in this infrastructure. This is an infrastructure that cuts across initiatives, time, levels of funding, economic well-being, and specific needs of individuals living in rural areas. It is a way of thinking about and responding to change and the needs of customers and those at risk. Just as informants revealed that rurality is not so much a place as a way of life, service integration is not so much an activity or event as it is a function: Service integration does not appear to exist outside of its purpose. In rural areas it appears service integration helps to compensate for an inadequate infrastructure that fails to meet customer needs. In some cases it appears to be done out of necessity, in other cases simply because it makes sense. It is a strategy staff utilize to be successful in identifying and responding to customer needs and maintaining their capacity as demonstrated in Table 9.

Funding for specific initiatives like transportation will be short-lived and affect a handful of people. Efforts to change the culture of organizations and how they identify and respond to the needs of customers will have a more lasting and universal effect than fragmented and individual attempts to randomly place Band-Aids on the rural universe of this inquiry. What was discovered about meeting the needs of customers living in rural areas is that the type of need and

resolving the need are less predicated on whether the need is transportation, child care, or housing, for example. The success of meeting a specific need appears contingent upon the universal approach and strategies staff take to identify and resolve all issues. Part of this infrastructure consists of creating a culture where these successful strategies can be identified, tested, and confirmed within their own rural context.

Success is attributed more to these comprehensive and systemic strategies and not so much to an isolated way of resolving independent issues through specific programs or initiatives. An informant describes this level of comprehensiveness.

> There are many levels of success we strive to achieve. It is not just about getting a job. It is about a better way of life. It may be about child care and taking care of your children. It might be about getting your driver's's license or eating better or getting the next job to get out of poverty.

Customer issues are often not independent of one another, therefore why would a fragmented approach be effective in resolving them? It appears some of the agencies in the study successful at resolving transportation barriers are the same agencies successful at resolving or contributing to the resolution of child care issues, issues related to motivation and self-esteem, and other issues of the customer. While these agencies take a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of the customer, they do not do it alone. Their success is not a program or funding stream: It is a strategy for addressing issues across agencies. Part of the infrastructure consists of agencies working together to maximize and integrate all of their collective resources.

Good News, Bad News

The good news for the government and taxpayers is the apparent success of the agencies working together is not solely predicated upon funding. The bad news is that you cannot buy what they have. What they have are common values, outcomes, direction, and customers. They have a joint commitment and direction to meet the needs of each customer and for each customer to access the services they need to become independent and to sustain self-sufficiency. Agencies agree not to compete, but to integrate their resources and reduce the negative impact of agencies which want to compete or control. The infrastructure these counties have developed has taken years of trust-building, experimentation, and risk-taking. It includes systems that are flexible and responsive to the needs of the customer, labor market trends, and legislation and are resilient to outside influences. An informant describes their level of responsiveness to job seekers: "We are really responsive. We grab the minimum amount of information necessary. If you need to buy two tires in order to get to work the next day, we will get you those two tires before tomorrow." The most common element among them appears to be staff with a "can do attitude" which appears to influence every other aspect of the organization. This attitude was articulated in this comment by an informant.

> We'll do damn near anything to keep them from getting on [welfare]. And we'll do near

> anything to get them off or reduce their benefits. If you need child care, then well, if it takes one of us watching your kid, we will do it.

Other characteristics of staff are included in Table 10. It also appears that leadership plays a critical role in establishing the culture and support for service integration and a "can do attitude" in others as demonstrated in earlier works, although not in a rural context, by Melaville and Blank (1991) and Imel (1994). Issues regarding staff capacity in rural areas are identified in Table 11. A leader from one of the case studies shares his insight.

> I was the catalyst, this is true. There were a few interested businesses interested in making this all a reality. Staff changed. They thought, 'This is neat. How do I figure this out?' My attitude was infectious. My 'can do,' my 'think of things as a challenge, not a barrier,' my philosophy of letting people come up with and try new ideas gave them a great environment to work in. Now, staff don't complain about the more 'difficult' cases, they like the 'challenging cases.'. . . .It doesn't matter what the barrier is. Any barrier you have, I can beat, but you have to be vested in making the change happen. . . .I like to motivate people, allow the brain to get out of the predictable.

Funding alone will not improve the infrastructure that exists in rural communities. By identifying some of the characteristics of the invisible infrastructure, it is hoped that other communities can learn from the failures and successes of those included in this inquiry and enhance their rural infrastructures.

Emerging Themes and Variations: The Rural Filter

There were several common themes among the agencies included in the study. Those themes focus on how agencies identify and respond to customer needs and include the role of the organization's culture and capacity, soft skill development and other services to meet the holistic needs of customers, service delivery, and overcoming barriers in rural areas. Strategies for identifying and responding to client needs can be found in Table 9. What is common among these themes is the way in which they are influenced by rurality. In order to be effective in a rural area, factors and strategies appear to be filtered for their application to and possible success in each rural area. Imagine each rural area taking all of the factors related to service integration in the literature and pouring them through a filtration system. What would filter through are variations on these factors as they can be applied to each rural area.

The rural filter may have four distinct chambers: Culture and Capacity of the Organization, Needs of Customers, Services and Service Delivery Strategies, and Saboteurs and Barriers. Factors of service integration are filtered through these chambers for their applicability to rural areas. Once filtered for elements of culture and capacity in the first chamber, contents move to the second chamber to be filtered for the needs of customers living in rural areas. Once factors have been filtered for their influence on customer needs, the third chamber filters for services and service delivery strategies that will be effective in meeting those needs in rural areas. An

informant shares some of the elements of their delivery model.

> The rural values of independence, resourcefulness, helping neighbors and sharing resources must be reflected in the delivery model for employment services. Traditionally, rural people have learned to 'make do' with less by using their resources efficiently and creatively. The partner agencies services the rural poor must respect and conserve the client's precious resources including gasoline, wear and tear on vehicles if they even own one, phone bills, child care, time and energy. In addition, the resources that each agency brings to the service delivery system must be respected and used wisely.

The last chamber filters for saboteurs such as staff who or other agencies which may block service integration and, or access to services. The chamber also filters for any other barriers inherent in rural areas. Informants and respondents have helped to identify the various chambers and what factors are filtered within each chamber. The visual image of this dimension of the rural filter is depicted in Figure 5. By asking respondents to identify and rank factors influencing service integration in rural areas, it appears they did so through a rural filter, discarding factors that were not an influence and sharing stories that identified various themes and variations on each factor. Some of the elements they utilized to screen for applicability to service integration in rural areas are identified in the first dimension of the rural filter. As a result of their screening, it appears that the features of rurality strongly influence service integration in rural areas in positive and negative ways, as demonstrated in the category of Rurality being ranked as the highest facilitator of and barrier to service integration in rural areas. It was possible, through interviews and case studies, to understand some of the strategies utilized to facilitate service integration and some of the results.

There are two dimensions to the rural filter. The first dimension, demonstrated in Figure 5, identifies some of the factors for which the filter screens, as identified in Table 12. The filtration process allows factors to be placed within a rural context. In addition, it appears the filter is also utilized in the same way to screen for replicable strategies that would be successful in meeting customer needs.

Informants identified specific strategies for addressing some of these issues. While somewhat outside the scope of this inquiry, the strategies embody many of the factors of service integration in rural areas. By reviewing these strategies one can see how some of the factors and, or elements of the factors are applied to rural areas. The issues and strategies that appear relevant to rural areas are identified in Table 8.

Given the apparent attributes of rural areas, values, outcomes, direction, and strategies have to be relevant to the context in which they will be applied or they may fail. This appears to be more of a mental process for staff than a litmus test and something that appears to be done almost intuitively by some staff in this inquiry. For example, securing employment and self-sufficiency is a goal of the PRWORA. When the issue of employment as a factor within the category of Rurality is screened through the rural filter, staff can look realistically at the employment

opportunities that exist in rural areas, like future economic growth and how to connect job seekers in remote areas to existing job opportunities when they refuse to move to more highly populated areas. An informant shares:

> When we ask people to move closer to jobs, many tell us that they don't want to raise their kids in the 'city' or put them in that school district. They seem to prioritize physical location as a more important influence on the lives of their children than economic self-sufficiency would be.

The rural filter allows staff to filter for the permutations of issues and resolutions that will work in a local area. What results are themes and variations on these factors as described in the findings. While the rural filter may be utilized by all rural areas, the filtration process will screen for those factors applicable to a specific area. This infers that staff are knowledgeable of the culture and capacity of their agency and other agencies, needs of job seekers, multiple services and delivery strategies, and barriers that could prevent them and their customers from being successful. While the findings help to identify factors of service integration in rural areas, themes and variations on those factors from individual respondents and informants facilitate the need to identify those elements characteristic of the majority of rural areas and the need for flexibility with respect to local application. Once an area has utilized the rural filter, what remains are the specific factors of and strategies for facilitating service integration in rural areas and for overcoming barriers. An example of the factors as they appear to have been filtered by one county are represented in Figure 6, the second dimension of the filter.

Emerging Themes and Variations: Creating Service Constellations Within a Rural Context

It appears rural areas do share some common elements. Lack of an adequate infrastructure, low population density, and geographic isolation, for example, were common elements. As demonstrated from the survey, these and other factors within the category of rurality were ranked as the highest facilitators of and barriers to service integration in New York State. There are two observations to be made regarding the commonality of these features. First, there are varying degrees of geographic isolation and unemployment, for example, as demonstrated by the 12 percent of respondents stating there were good employment opportunities, while 16 percent stated employment opportunities were not always appropriate or were limited to entry-level work. Unemployment rates for each of the 42 rural counties involved in the study are identified in Table 13. The majority of counties indicated a lack of employment opportunities. Secondly, the degree to which these elements impact service integration and meeting customer needs varies from county to county. For example, everyone in County B who needs transportation has transportation. The factor, access to services due to population disbursement, was ranked by respondents of County B as the third highest barrier to service integration, whereas it was ranked as the highest barrier by all respondents. County size and population statistics for each of the 42 rural counties are identified in Table 14. County B found a way to work together across agencies to successfully address this barrier, however, it does not mean that the inherent need for transportation has been resolved. An informant explains.

> We had someone in a minium wage go no where job. She came to us and we discovered she had a CNA [Certified Nurse Assistant]. Well, with a CNA you may not make a lot more than minimum wage, but there are more jobs and you can develop a career ladder. There is potential. She came in and told us that it had lapsed. We explained the potential to her and got the 1-800 number for her and had her make the call right here in the office. The reason that she had let it lapse was that she did not drive and all of the CNA jobs were in more highly populated areas or she needed a car. She would not move. She did not drive. So then we took her out and got her a permit and taught her how to drive.

While it is possible to analyze the survey data and detailed stories of informants and identify the factors that appear to have the most influence on service integration in rural areas, it is also important to understand that the rural context of each county varies by the degree to which elements of rurality exist and are allowed to impact service integration. Each rural county has their own unique context. This inquiry has allowed for the analysis of the common features and factors of service integration and the recognition of a rural context in which to evaluate the unique characteristics of each rural area.

The framework emerged as a result of this analysis of common features and factors and recognition that each rural area would need to evaluate and apply the findings through a rural filter that would screen factors based upon the culture and capacity of their specific organizations, the needs of customers living in their communities, services and service delivery strategies necessary to meet the needs of their customers, and specific barriers present in their rural areas that may or may not be present in other rural areas. It appears that one of the common elements of service integration in rural area includes a process by which an organization identifies its values, outcomes, direction, and capacity as influenced by customer needs, legislation, and other sources and how to respond to customer needs within this context. The function of service integration appears to be of value when trying to identify and respond to the customer in a holistic and comprehensive way. If a mental health agency is serving the customer at the same time the school system is working with the customer to obtain a high school diploma, and the local Department of Social Services is working with the customer to connect them to various fiscal resources and employment, service integration appears to be a means of sharing information and working in unison to address all of the needs of the customer in a comprehensive and integrated way. The mental health agency may not have the expertise to assist the customer with getting a diploma. The local Department of Social Services may not have the expertise related to resolving the mental health issues of the customer. If the customer has other issues, staff work within the service constellation to connect them to other services. It appears in some rural areas that staff are the One-Stop for customers, referring them to other resources and ensuring they access those resources irrespective of brick and mortar. Staff recognize the attributes and barriers of their rurality and respond to them effectively. They recognize how the environment influences the needs and attributes of the customer and how they need to work with other agencies to pool resources. The second dimension of the framework provides a visual image of this process.

The framework focuses on how an agency helps to create the service constellation for the customer, as demonstrated in Figure 7. The framework is framed by a rural context. This rural context includes the factors known to influence service integration in rural areas. It provides a sequential way for rural agencies to think about service integration in rural areas; while represented sequentially many of the activities are concurrent, as indicated by the arrows which represent feedback loops. Within the framework lies the inner workings of the organization beginning with the culture and capacity of the organization, what it values, its function, outcomes, and direction; resources; how it filters for rural issues and application to rural areas; and how it institutionalizes change. Staff appear to be the second largest influence on service integration in rural areas with respect to their capacity, motivation, and self-esteem.

In order for an agency to identify its function it needs to understand the customer and their needs and what is expected from relevant legislation, funding sources, and other agencies or organizations which influence them. It appears that respect for the customer and demonstrating the customer's's value to the customer helps develop trust and a relationship between staff and the customer. Through a positive relationship, needs appear to be identified and resolved more effectively and customers seem more willing to engage in activities despite their initial reluctance, resentment, and, or resistance. An employer describes the results of establishing positive relationships and improving the attitude of job seekers.

> I am not saying that you can teach these people everything in four weeks when some of these people haven't worked for years. You know, some of them have bad work habits, poor skills, don't know how to get along with the people they work with. The program is incredible. It is like magic for many of them. I can't describe it, but the difference in these people between the time they start through until the time they finish is just nothing short of a miracle. You would just have to see it. These people can now make good decisions for their lives, they know they have opportunities. They have a positive attitude.

Needs are identified one customer at a time, one need at a time, and the inter-relationship of needs are also identified. Motivation, self-esteem, and the resources of the job seeker customer appear to be the foundation necessary for the job seeker to be successful. A service constellation is created for each job seeker utilizing their strengths and resources and those of other agencies. Staff capacity, motivation, self-esteem, and commitment are leverage from other agencies. Staff connect the dots between agencies to ensure the customer has full access to the range of services that exist in rural communities. If there are gaps in services, agencies pool their expertise to apply for additional funding or become more creative in leveraging existing community resources. Together agencies reduce the conflict between competing issues, outcomes, and outside influences and reduce the impact of saboteurs and other barriers that may prevent the customer and agency from being successful.

Shared values, outcomes, and direction create a conduit between agencies in the service constellation. This is not to imply that all values and outcomes are in common. Each agency has their own values and outcomes and are not required to compromise their integrity in order to be

part of the service constellation. Agencies do identify what characteristics they have in common and how their differences may compliment one another. As discovered in County A, it is not enough to share values and outcomes. It is necessary to share a common direction. While each agency may agree that employment is the outcome, conflict arises when agencies disagree on how a customer will achieve this goal. Service integration includes not only connecting the dots between agencies, but the sequence and timing of the connection and how each outcome will be achieved; one voice.

Several studies, such as those conducted by Kogan (1997) and Owen (1992), describe the need for common outcomes and vision and Bruner (1991) describes the role direction plays. These studies do not demonstrate the need for all three, nor how together they may or may not influence service integration. The missing component in County A and clearly demonstrated in all of the other case studies was direction. Prior to focusing on direction, staff focused on creating a culture based upon what they value. From these values emerged a culture, vision, outcomes, and direction. The findings from this inquiry seem to imply that the three factors, culture, outcomes, and direction, are interdependent and influenced by one another: To study one or conclude that one or two factors are important may not provide the information necessary to understand the full continuum of processes necessary for service integration to be conceived, implemented, and sustained.

Commitment of staff to work with other agencies to achieve common outcomes was ranked as the highest facilitator to service integration in rural areas. Sharing values and outcomes is not enough. Achieving outcomes for the customer and agency is the ultimate function of each organization and consequently the function of service integration. The necessary behavior of staff in order to achieve these outcomes appears to be their level of commitment to work with other agencies to achieve common outcomes. Commitment is a verb; it is the action that appears of value, not as one respondent states, "posturing." It is in the reality of service integration — sharing values, outcomes, and direction — that agencies share accountability for meeting customer needs. Harvey (2000) and others found that while informants espoused the quality of their efforts to integrate services the reality differed greatly from what Harvey refers to as rhetoric, another reason for studying service integration by observing it first-hand. In order to be accountable, counties in the case studies clearly identified customer outcomes. Each outcome was tracked, documented, and verified. The data was evaluated and results utilized to strategically plan for the development and implementation of more effective services and service delivery strategies. In some cases, as an informant states, it is a strategy of changing the mix of services or identifying those in need who have not accessed services.

Together agencies improve service constellations and customer outcomes through a shared continuous improvement process. Feedback loops are built into this system between customers, staff, staff from other agencies, and saboteurs, as demonstrated by the two-way arrows shown in Figure 7. Informants state they need to identify the barriers and stay current with the activities of saboteurs who may have a negative influence on their customers. They reach out to these saboteurs, continuing to project their values and maintaining their knowledge of possible barriers

and how they may change and impact their success. The agencies in the case studies appear to function within this framework. The framework was shared with informants from three counties who verified its accuracy with respect to its visual representation of the reality as it appears in their counties.

Rural agencies face many challenges. They have to provide services where they do not exist. They have to work in an environment where one person or one agency could sabotage their efforts. They work with customers who live in isolation and may be unwilling to move or who may lack motivation and self-esteem to make any changes in their lives. By creating unique service constellations for each customer, each customer is afforded the opportunity to be successful in the rural universe. For many customers this is the only universe they know and this is where many of them choose to stay.

Summary: Conclusions

It appears the role of rurality in service integration may be understated in the literature. For example, the apparent success of the PRWORA in rural areas that some researchers have documented may be attributed to the result achieved by overcoming barriers inherent to rural areas and how they were identified and resolved, yet unrecognized when merely measuring caseload size and unemployment rates. If this is so, what is known about the success of initiatives such as the PRWORA and WIA in rural areas only tells part of the story. It provides us with the results, but not how they were achieved. If achieving the goals of legislation or regulations in rural areas is related to overcoming the barriers inherent to these areas or is enhanced by living in a rural area, it is important to know more about these specific factors, a lesson to be applied to the implementation of the Workforce Investment Act. Perhaps it is not enough to quote figures of earnings, employment rates, and case closures in rural areas; compare them to more highly populated areas; and conclude rural areas have been equally successful as more highly populated areas when the barriers faced by customers living in rural areas may be different and require individualized and, or different interventions.

What was missing from the review of literature, in addition to general information on service integration in rural areas, is knowledge of the connection between and the permutations of culture and staff, shared goals and direction, and customer needs within the context of the rural universe. While Harvey (2000) and Tickamyer (2000) along with others identify the lack of infrastructure and the characteristics of rural areas and Fletcher (2000) and Kusserow (1991a) call for the need to recognize the influence of “context” on service integration, no one study has considered how these particular factors interact with respect to service integration. This inquiry helps formulate the need and basis for such a study.

Secondly, it appears staff are the backbone to the success of complying with changes in legislation, meeting customer needs, and that service integration is utilized as a strategy for compensating for an inadequate infrastructure and overcoming barriers inherent in rural areas of New York State. Staff appear to be the framework in which to invest and build upon, not special

programs which can be bought with funding: They are secondary. Staff help facilitate service constellations for customers and help connect the dots between services, keeping the customer engaged in services supporting and sustaining their self-sufficiency. Providing funding for services to agencies without knowledgeable, motivated staff who are part of a culture and environment that has developed the strategies necessary to be successful in rural areas, may be an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars and may deny customers access to the high quality services they need.

The question is to what degree has an investment been made in changing the culture of organizations and providing the systemic change that would impact the quality of services and customer outcomes? According to informants, and to use a common cliche, some staff in rural areas appear to be overworked, underpaid, and unable to successfully meet the needs of customers. They lack the infrastructure and the capacity to succeed and, or to sustain their success and respond effectively to change. Some agencies continue to practice the same strategies as prior to reform, remaining punitive in their actions, living and dying by the numbers, and, or wanting to educate instead of combining work with learning.

Addressing transportation, child care, or any other isolated issue is not the underlying answer in rural areas. The answer in rural areas appears to be the staff infrastructure, staff who creatively coordinate funding, other resources, and services. Without them millions of dollars for transportation or other isolated activities would not bring about the comprehensive approach and results to issues related to education, the PRWORA, and workforce development. Staff resources and the strategies they utilize to work together with other agencies to identify and respond to customer needs transcend legislation, specific customer need, appropriations, and the status of the economy. Should the economy slow or falter, should appropriations be reduced, what will remain of the government's investment in these initiatives?

It appears the most significant finding of this inquiry is the identification of a rural framework upon which to address customer needs, legislation, and regulations in rural areas. It is the characteristics of staff and the culture of the organization which provide the infrastructure for success in rural areas. The one response to these findings that would have the most systemic and long-term effect on rural agencies would be to help rural agencies create a change in or enhance the culture of their organizations as demonstrated by Counties B, C, and D. It is a culture that values the attributes of the customers with whom they work and their needs, and balances those needs with the outcomes of legislation and outside influence. It is a culture that assesses each customer's's needs one at a time and responds to them one at a time with a customized service constellation that connects multiple agencies, resources, and services. It is a culture responsive to customer needs and the needs of other agencies and their own agency. It is a culture that is committed to following the customer through employment, retention, and beyond. It is, as one informant states, a "can do attitude." There are no barriers, only challenges in the rural universe of County B. These findings are summarized in Table 15.

Investing in organizational change and sustainability can be a positive way to ensure the

funding provided for services is maximized in the best interest of the customer and legislation. Agencies with a “can do attitude” may be more successful than others in the pending future. What do we know about these agencies? What can we share that will maximize every program and fiscal resource? Address the culture of the organization and staff characteristics first and successful services and outcomes will result. Place programs and funding with organizations which demonstrate the strategies necessary to successfully identify and respond to customer needs and achieve the goals of legislation through service integration in rural areas.

Table 1
Factors as Facilitators and Barriers, Listed in Alphabetical Order and in Rank Order by Facilitator and Barrier

Factor	Facilitator	Barrier
Funding	4	2
Need	3	3
Organizational, Accountability	5	5
Outside Influence	9	4
Rurality	1	1
Service Coordination	8	8
Services	6	9
Service Delivery	7	7
Staff	2	6

Table 2
Influence of Rurality by Categories of Focus, Listed in Alphabetical Order

Category	Examples of Influence
Funding	No economy of scale Competition with more highly populated areas Lack of adequate funding Need greater flexibility to meet needs specific to a rural area Limited cash flow
Need	Great distance to services Lack of transportation; need privately owned vehicles Isolated Must build trust Limited economic growth; limited job opportunities Limited skills, both soft and hard skills Limited income Unwillingness to more to more urban areas to secure work High unemployment Level of independence Psychological barriers Geographic isolation Negative attitude toward government intervention Strong kinship network Reliance on informal economy
Organizational, Accountability	Lack of identity with statewide issues by state agencies Small size of staff, budget, and other resources Inability to apply for funding given limited staff resources Lack of technology Organizations want to deal with local issues, not statewide initiatives Lack of staff development to address needs of people living in rural areas Agency isolation
Outside Influence	Lack of awareness of rural issues by those outside of rural areas Competition with more highly populated areas County prohibits hiring additional staff One-Stop centralizes services at one site instead of bringing services to those in remote areas Need greater flexibility than legislation and policies offer Statewide initiatives and legislation that does not recognize differences between rural and more highly populated areas

Category	Examples of Influence
Service Coordination	Lack of technology Long distance to drive to meetings Competition for funding and customers Lack of staff time
Service Delivery	No critical mass; low population density Fewer facilities Need for customized services Need to bring services to customer or customer to services Limited access to distance learning alternatives Higher cost of serving customers in remote areas
Services	Lack of infrastructure Fewer in quantity and quality Fewer options of service providers
Staff	Lower salaries More difficult to recruit people with expertise needed Competition with more highly populated areas Inability to hire additional staff High staff turnover

Table 3

Factors With the Most Positive Influence on Service Integration, Listed in Descending Rank Order

Order	Factors as Facilitators	Salience
1	Commitment of staff to work with other agencies to achieve common outcomes	3
2	Flexibility of staff when working with other agencies	6
3	Leadership	7*
4	Government intervention and regulations	33
5	High unemployment levels	24
6	Personnel who have identified integration as a successful strategy for achieving outcomes	8
7	Level of community climate for creating partnerships	7*
8	Achieving shared outcomes with other agencies**	10
8	Quality of services**	5
8	Funding only accessible through coordination of services with other agencies**	19

Note. The symbol * indicates two categories sharing the same rank order rounded to the second decimal.

Table 4

New York State Poverty Statistics for Rural Counties

	Based on 1990 Census Data			Based on May 1998 New York State Department of Labor Data	
Rural Counties	Population	Median Income by Household	Number Below Poverty	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Recipients	Cases
Allegany	50,470	$24,164	6,726	2,064	730
Cattaraugus	84,234	$23,421	11,394	1,980	746
Cayuga	82,313	$27,568	7,932	1,268	499
Chautauqua	141,895	$24,183	18,818	5,475	1,978
Chenango	51,768	$26,032	5,942	974	336
Clinton	85,969	$26,903	10,294	1,653	674
Columbia	62,982	$29,785	5,835	1,289	485
Cortland	48,963	$26,791	5,810	1,197	419
Delaware	47,225	$17,687	5,768	513	202
Essex	37,152	$25,002	4,263	769	282
Franklin	46,540	$21,791	7,354	1,213	456
Fulton	54,191	$23,862	6,889	1,290	471
Genesee	60,060	$30,955	4,300	732	259
Greene	44,739	$27,469	4,081	1,189	446
Hamilton	5,279	$23,195	450	38	19
Herkimer	65,707	$23,075	8,453	931	341
Jefferson	110,943	$25,929	12,252	3,385	1,257
Lewis	26,796	$25,599	3,495	396	141

	Based on 1990 Census Data			Based on May 1998 New York State Department of Labor Data	
Rural Counties	Population	Median Income by Household	Number Below Poverty	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Recipients	Cases
Livingston	62,372	$30,981	4,826	1,064	422
Madison	69,120	$29,547	5,872	462	205
Montgomery	51,981	$24,068	5,990	899	313
Ontario	95,101	$33,133	6,784	1,521	562
Orleans	41,846	$28,359	3,821	1,050	405
Oswego	121,777	$29,083	13,614	2,938	1,108
Otsego	60,517	$25,099	7,758	427	168
Putnam	83,941	$53,634	3,045	257	112
Rensselaer	154,429	$31,958	13,779	3,405	1,211
St. Lawrence	111,974	$23,799	17,414	3,670	1,421
Saratoga	181,276	$36,635	10,509	681	301
Schoharie	31,859	$26,077	3,415	330	132
Schuyler	18,662	$25,712	2,026	285	106
Seneca	33,683	$28,604	3,383	411	158
Steuben	99,088	$25,312	13,087	3,378	1,163
Sullivan	69,277	$27,582	8,805	1,912	695
Tioga	52,337	$31,497	4,823	1,055	420
Tompkins	94,097	$27,742	15,688	1,469	585
Ulster	165,304	$34,033	13,450	3,697	1,459
Warren	59,209	$30,434	5,307	606	238
Washington	59,330	$28,660	5,333	1,324	518

	Based on 1990 Census Data			Based on May 1998 New York State Department of Labor Data	
Rural Counties	Population	Median Income by Household	Number Below Poverty	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Recipients Cases	
Wayne	89,123	$32,469	7,273	1,882	687
Wyoming	42,507	$27,515	3,300	394	151
Yates	22,810	$24,874	2,969	205	86

Note. The acronym NA means that information is not available. Poverty thresholds in 1989 for persons under age 65 were $6,451 for one person, $8,547 for a family size of two, and $9,990 for an adult and two related children. (Census, 1990.)

Table 5

Factors With the Most Negative Influence on Service Integration, Listed in Descending Order of Influence

Order	Factors as Facilitators	Salience
1	Access to services due to population disbursement	9
2	Categorical funding	12
3	Funding uncertainties*	7**
3	Bureaucratization*	3
4	Geographic isolation***	7**
4	Variety of needs in rural areas***	17
5	Legalities of serving individuals across funding streams and agencies	1
6	Amount of time for planning, implementation, and achievement of outcomes across agencies	13****
7	High cost of service delivery due to population disbursement	13****
8	High unemployment levels	37

Note. The symbol * indicates two categories of focus share the same rank order, rounded to the second decimal.

Table 6

Permutations of Factors That Drive Organizations, As Identified by Survey Respondents

Permutations
Case management versus enforcement
Customer versus money
Customer versus labor market
Customer versus numbers
Education and training versus a job
Meeting client need versus agency existence
Program versus eligibility
Services versus participation rates
Strength based and self-sufficiency versus punitive and sanctioning

Table 7

Percent of Residents Utilizing Public Transportation in Rural Areas

Rural Counties	Mean Travel Time to Work in Minutes	Percentage of Working Population Using Public Transportation	Number of Working Population Commuting to Work
Allegany	17.5	0.2%	20,581
Cattaraugus	17.9	1.0%	35,291
Cayuga	20.4	1.8%	35,153
Chautauqua	15.3	1.3%	61,148
Chenango	18.8	0.5%	23,080
Clinton	16.3	0.8%	37,816
Columbia	21.7	2.2%	28,984
Cortland	17.7	0.9%	22,588
Delaware	17.9	1.2%	19,754
Essex	17.1	0.4%	14,877
Franklin	15.9	1.1%	17,587
Fulton	19.2	1.8%	23,461
Genesee	20.5	0.8%	28,266
Greene	23.3	1.6%	18,347
Hamilton	19.4	0.6%	2,128
Herkimer	18.1	0.6%	26,906
Jefferson	16.3	1.3%	49,101
Lewis	19.0	0.7%	10,937
Livingston	23.3	0.3%	28,899
Madison	20.2	0.6%	31,913
Montgomery	20.1	2.2%	21,902

Rural Counties	Mean Travel Time to Work in Minutes	Percentage of Working Population Using Public Transportation	Number of Working Population Commuting to Work
Ontario	21.6	0.6%	46,239
Orleans	22.8	0.2%	17,542
Oswego	21.1	1.2%	50,706
Otsego	18.6	1.3%	26,393
Putnam	32.8	6.2%	44,216
Rensselaer	20.7	4.5%	75,088
St. Lawrence	16.4	0.5%	43,121
Saratoga	22.7	1.1%	90,564
Schoharie	24.0	1.6%	13,764
Schuyler	22.6	1.1%	8,002
Seneca	18.9	0.4%	15,565
Steuben	18.4	0.7%	42,277
Sullivan	21.4	2.4%	29,155
Tioga	21.2	0.4%	24,246
Tompkins	16.4	0.4%	45,175
Ulster	21.6	1.7%	78,739
Warren	18.4	1.1%	26,866
Washington	20.7	1.0%	24,998
Wayne	22.8	0.5%	41,699
Wyoming	22.4	0.4%	17,757
Yates	22.0	0.3%	9,933

Table 8

Issues and Strategies Relevant to Rural Areas

Issues	Strategies
Accessibility	Bring services to job seekers in their home or place of employment. Locate services near the homes or places of employment. Bring the job seeker to services. Provide the services necessary to secure a driver's license and a reliable form of transportation. Provide services when convenient for the job seeker: Do not compete with work. Work with other agencies to reduce conflicts in schedules and multiple trips.
Job seeker Reliance on an Informal Economy	Recognize and respect the value the job seeker places on this form of income. Identify transferable skills to other employment opportunities. Assist the job seeker with evaluating a budget that would make them self-sufficient. Provide support systems and additional training.
Competition with More Highly Populated Areas for Funding and Staff	Publicize rural stories and data that will impact funding levels and distribution patterns on state and federal levels. Form partnerships with more highly populated areas to deliver services and share staff in less populated areas. Utilize the Workforce Development System as a mechanism to ensure access and quality of services.
Fewer Service Options	Work collaboratively with other agencies to maximize the collective capacity instead of fragmenting services. Work collaboratively to bring other funding streams into the community. Ensure what services do exist are responsive, flexible, and accessible.
Geographic Isolation	Empathize with and respect job seekers who are not well integrated into society. Work with them to make a developmentally appropriate transition to work. Provide activities that will help job seekers develop a support network where they can develop trust and a positive self-image. One of the drawbacks to providing services in a centralized area is that it removes the job seeker from the area in which he or she is

Issues	Strategies
	most comfortable and will most likely seek work. Gradually extend the geographic area in which the job seeker feels comfortable.
High Unemployment	Provide highly monitored work experience alternatives for job seekers who cannot find work. Match job seekers with employment opportunities that will be successful for them. Provide transportation, mentoring, and other support systems. Assist job seekers with developing a career ladder. Assist job seekers in identifying the issues related to moving to secure employment. Help the job seeker expand their comfort level with securing employment outside of their immediate area by expanding the geographic barrier beyond its existing boundary. Support the job seeker in his or her decision to move or remain. If the job seeker moves, they will need help establishing a new support system. If they stay, they will have to be more active in preparing themselves for the employment opportunities that do exist and develop alternative means to survive until they can secure a better job. Help job seekers access Food Stamps and other resources to bring them above the poverty level. Be aware of economic development efforts in the community. Become part of the marketing campaign to new employers looking for a qualified workforce.
Independence of Some Job seekers	Respect the independence of job seekers who are self-reliant and do not want interference from the government. Choose the agency considered to be most neutral to work with the job seeker. The process may take time. Refrain from offering to help out. Reinforce the temporary nature of the assistance. Clearly articulate how the job seeker can help him or herself and utilize their own resources.
Kinship Network	Kinship can have a positive or negative influence on the job seeker. If positive, capitalize on the positive attributes of the family and how they can be leveraged on behalf of the job seeker. If negative, find positive ways to re-enforce the change in the job seeker's self-image and the concept of work and eradicate the possibility of them becoming the exception. Facilitate networks of support through agency staff, peers, and, or business owners.
Lack of	Partner with other agencies and possibly other counties to identify

Issues	Strategies
Appropriate and Accessible Staff Development	staff development needs. Pool resources to provide contextualized information that is relevant to rural areas. Communicate staff development needs on a regular basis to state-level agencies. Access statewide groups that provide staff development at no or reduced cost.
Lack of Child Care and, or Inaccessible Child Care	Explore alternative child care arrangements with family, neighbors, businesses, county legislature, foundations, other job seekers, and formal care givers. Develop an inventory of child care providers and maintain information on availability. Work with child care providers to expand services to evening and weekend hours by providing a pay differential and securing child care slots for job seekers who need flexible schedules. Work with agencies providing transportation to allow children to ride buses with moms and link existing routes to child care centers. Provide staff development to increase the number and quantity of child care providers.
Lack of Infrastructure	Continue to expand the infrastructure in rural areas through developing the capacity of staff. Provide staff the discretion to utilize flexible funding sources to better meet the diverse needs of job seekers living in rural areas.
Lack of Qualified Staff	Provide access to appropriate staff development activities. If funding is needed, partner with other agencies or across counties to pool funding resources. Create networks between similar agencies in other counties to share and resolve issues. Job share with other agencies or counties. Create staff capacity by ensuring the capacity of the organization is positive, that staff know what the agency values, and that the environment is conducive to achieving the agency's outcomes.
Lack of Public Transportation	Reduce fragmentation and duplication. Find a way on local, state, and, or federal levels to resolve the issues of providing services to job seekers funded from different funding streams. Utilize existing transportation infrastructures to expand routes and schedules to multiple populations. Provide privately owned vehicles where no adequate means of transportation exists. Job seekers will need assistance with loans, registration, insurance, maintenance, and repair. Some will need

Issues	Strategies
	a license, payment of fines, and point reduction classes. Others will need support to work with spouses or significant others who are threatened by the perceived independence that comes with having a license. Secure drivers to transport job seekers to and from work activities and work until a car can be secured.
Lack of Rural Identity	Share rural stories and data with those internal and external to the immediate geographic area. Identify elements of rurality present in a specific area, how they are different or similar to other rural and more highly populated areas. Partner with other rural counties to create a rural voice on specific areas of need such as localized training.
Lack of Technology	Utilize the technology infrastructure of agencies co-located. Develop simple soft ware to track and exchange data while waiting for statewide data systems. Utilize funding through the WIA to link agencies through technology. Identify staff training needs and access statewide vendors.
Limited Employment Opportunities: Lack of High Paying Jobs With Benefits	Connect job seekers to transitional services. Provide benefits after transitional benefits have expired. Maintain contact with each job seeker to match them with job opportunities that will lead to self-sufficiency. Engage job seekers in post-employment services that will help them develop career pathways and increase their employment options. Become more involved in economic development by marketing qualified job seekers.
Limited Facilities	Consider providing services in the home or at the place of employment. Consider distance learning and telecommuting. Consider colocation at schools.
Limited Hard and Soft Skills	Trust develops beginning with the first interaction. Exhaust every opportunity to develop trust and a relationship with the job seeker. Value and respect the attributes of the job seeker and build upon their strengths. Identify transferable skills. Create opportunities for job seekers to be successful and develop their skills in nonthreatening environments.

Issues	Strategies
	Connect the dots between services that address personal, academic, and employment related skills. Provide a network of support to continue to identify and address skill development and competing issues with work and family and the transition to self-sufficiency.
Low Population Density; No Critical Mass	Service delivery strategies have to be comprehensive in quality and quantity. In order to serve job seekers who are spread across a large geographic area, multiple service sites will need to be established, services will need to be brought to the job seeker's home or place of employment, and, or job seekers will need to be transported to services.
Low Salaries for Staff	This is an issue that should be resolved locally and is contingent upon civil service and union issue

Issues	Strategies
	s a n d t h e s i z e o f l o c a l b u d g e t s . R e s o l v i n g t h e a p p

Issues	Strategies
	a r e n t l a c k o f e c o n o m y o f s c a l e i n r u r a l a r e a s m a y h

Issues	Strategies
	e l p a d d r e s s t h i s i s s u e .
	Provide additional staff development and a conducive environment to cultivate skills and reduce staff turnover.
Negative Attitude Toward Government Intervention	Recognize and respect these attitudes. Model positive behaviors that reinforce trust and honest relationships. Provide assistance that is least invasive and threatening. Partner with other agencies which will be perceived as more neutral to provide services. Facilitate movement through the system as quickly as possible.
No Economy of Scale for Funding	Create geographic partnerships, integrating and leveraging the collective capacity across communities or regions. Share rural stories and data.
Outside Influences That Are Perceived to Be Restrictive and Inflexible	Identify elements of the legislation that are positive and negative and how much flexibility exists. Reduce consternation between competing values and outcomes.
Quality of	Pool resources within and across agencies to ensure the quality and

Issues	Strategies
Services is Threatened Due to Staff Resources and Limited Funding	quantify of services exists to meet the needs of job seekers. Cross-train staff to work in teams and share responsibility for the ebb and flow of work when additional staff cannot be hired. Channel funding where there is unmet need. Provide time for staff to develop strategies for resolving staffing issues. Establish, maintain, and reward desired staff behavior.
Size of Agencies With Respect to Fiscal and Human Capacity	Partner with other agencies to address needs of the organization. Consider the concept of interdependence. Form an neutral organization, across agencies or perhaps counties to secure a variety of funding. Be pro-active in planning for delayed funding.
Slow or Little Economic Growth	Every agency contributes to economic prosperity when they place a job ready job seeker in a job well suited for the job seeker and the employer. Market job seeker and agency success to employers, Chamber of Commerce, unions, and professional organizations.
Unwillingness for Customers to Move to More Urbanized Areas	See high unemployment.

Table 9

Identifying Job Seeker's Needs and Response

Identification and Response
Addresses all of the needs of the individual through agency partnerships
Aggressive
Clearly articulates the need of the job seeker customer and seeks affirmation from the job seeker
Clearly articulates the role and responsibility of customer and staff
Clearly articulates outcomes and their timeframe
Clearly articulates the response
Community approach to resolving needs
Comprehensive
Conducive meeting space
Creative resolutions
Customer needs frame services and service delivery strategies
Develops trust
Fosters independence not dependence
High level of expectations
Highly motivated to help the customer meet their needs
Immediate response
Investment of staff
Perceives how the customer perceives them and the agency
Perceives issues or barriers as challenges
Positive attitude toward customer and their circumstance
Rapid response
Recognizes the influence rurality has on the issue and the response
Recognizes strengths and builds on them
Relationship established between customer and staff
Staff travel the path with the customer
Take pride in and celebrate customer's's success
Utilize the customer's's resources to respond to the challenge
Value the customer, their unique circumstances, and resources

Table 10

Characteristics of Agency Culture: Staff Building Blocks

Characteristics
Shares philosophy, values, and vision of the organization and demonstrates such through behavior
Committed to values and outcomes of the organization
Develops trust in staff and customers
Facilitates achievement of outcomes
Flexible
Does not sabotage changes made in the organization
Adapts well to change
Motivated, “can do” attitude
Positive work ethic
Efficient
Effective
Willingness and ambition to do whatever it takes
Envisions barriers as challenges
Demonstrates understanding of customer needs
Is knowledgeable, uses common sense, and is aware of all services in the community
Does not allow personal feeling to interfere in meeting outcomes of the organization
Happy to take on challenges
Intrinsically motivated by customer success
Celebrates success with customer
Models positive behavior to customers
High level of self-esteem
Personal linkages within and external to the agency
Builds relationships with other staff
Identifies other’s perceptions of him or herself and the agency
Works well in teams
Communicates effectively
Patient with self, staff, customer
Responds rapidly to needs of customer and organization
Deals constructively with multiple tasks and feeling of being overworked
Thinks out of the box
Creative
Accesses available training
Ensures a person is not a program
Engages in strategic planning
Pro-active
Values and utilizes continuous improvement

Characteristics
Always testing new ideas and old ideas for relevance
Conducts their own research
Takes calculated risks
Transitions smoothly between initiatives

Table 11

Issues Regarding Staff Capacity in Rural Areas, Listed in Alphabetical Order

Issues
High staff, customer ratios for individualized services
Inability to hire additional staff
Inability to secure knowledgeable staff
Insufficient funding level for staff salaries, benefits and conducive working environment
High staff turnover
Lack of staff time to coordinate programs
Lack of staff time to respond to proposals and applications
Lack of accessible training
Lack of training relevant to rural areas
Low pay scale
Maintaining positive quality of the culture of the organization
Reduction of staff
Staff responsible for more than they can successfully accomplish

Table 12

Job Seeker Needs Framed by Rurality, Listed in Alphabetical Order

Job Seeker Needs
High cost of transportation
High unemployment
High level of independence
Inadequate economy to support infrastructure
Isolation, mental and physical
Importance of family relationships
Lack of a driver's license
Lack of access to services
Lack of services, quantity and quality
Lack of transportation
Lack of trust in government services
Long distance to access employment and services
Limited economic growth
Limited employment opportunities
Limited skills
Limited income
Limited technology
Psychological barriers
Unwillingness to move to more urban areas

Table 13

Unemployment Rate Averages Nationally, in New York State, and New York Rural Counties 1999 and 2000

National	Avg 99	Avg 00	New York State	Avg 99	Avg 00
	4.2	4.0		5.2	4.6
Rural Counties	Avg 99	Avg 00	Rural Counties	Avg 99	Avg 00
Allegany	7.7* **	7.1	Ontario	4.2	3.9
Cattaraugus	7.2* **	6.5	Orleans	5.4* **	5.7
Cayuga	5.3* **	4.8	Oswego	6.5* **	6.6
Chautauqua	5.2**	4.8	Otsego	5.3* **	4.9
Chenango	6.0* **	5.2	Putnam	2.9	2.5
Clinton	6.6* **	5.7	Rensselaer	4.0	3.9
Columbia	3.1	2.9	St. Lawrence	8.5* **	8.4
Cortland	6.9* **	6.2	Saratoga	3.3	3.4
Delaware	5.3* **	5.1	Schoharie	5.3* **	5.3
Essex	8.7* **	7.4	Schuyler	5.9* **	5.5
Franklin	8.0* **	8.3	Seneca	5.6* **	5.2
Fulton	6.1* **	6.0	Steuben	5.8* **	5.2
Genesee	5.3* **	5.1	Sullivan	6.0* **	4.9
Greene	5.4* **	5.0	Tioga	3.8	3.6
Hamilton	10.7* **	8.9	Tompkins	2.9	2.6
Herkimer	5.3* **	5.3	Ulster	3.6	3.4
Jefferson	9.3* **	8.6	Warren	5.2**	4.2
Lewis	9.1* **	8.9	Washington	4.8**	4.4
Livingston	5.0**	5.0	Wayne	5.1**	4.7

Rural Counties	Avg 99	Avg 00	Rural Counties	Avg 99	Avg 00
Madison	4.7**	4.7	Wyoming	7.3* **	6.3
Montgomery	6.4* **	6.1	Yates	4.2	4.1

Note. The symbol * indicates unemployment rates above the State average. The symbol ** indicates unemployment rates above the national average.

Table 14

New York State Rural County Size and Population Statistics, Listed in Alphabetical Order

Rural Counties	Square Miles	Population	Rural Counties	Square Miles	Population
Allegany	1,030.0	50,470	Orleans	391.4	41,846
Cattaraugus	1,309.9	84,234	Oswego	953.3	121,777
Cayuga	693.3	82,313	Otsego	1,002.9	60,517
Chautauqua	1,062.1	141,895	Putnam	231.5	83,941
Chenango	894.4	51,768	Rensselaer	654.0	154,429
Clinton	1,039.4	85,969	St. Lawrence	2,685.7	111,974
Columbia	635.8	62,982	Saratoga	811.9	181,276
Cortland	499.7	48,963	Schoharie	621.8	31,859
Delaware	1,446.4	47,225	Schuyler	328.7	18,662
Essex	1,797.0	37,152	Seneca	324.9	33,683
Franklin	1,631.6	46,540	Steuben	1,392.7	99,088
Fulton	496.2	54,191	Sullivan	969.8	69,277
Genesee	494.1	60,060	Tioga	518.7	52,337
Greene	647.9	44,739	Tompkins	476.1	94,097
Hamilton	1,720.7	5,279	Ulster	1,126.6	165,304
Herkimer	1,411.9	65,707	Warren	869.7	59,209
Jefferson	1,272.3	110,943	Washington	835.5	59,330
Lewis	1,275.6	26,796	Wayne	604.2	89,123
Livingston	632.2	62,372	Wyoming	592.0	42,507
Madison	655.9	69,120	Yates	338.3	22,810
Montgomery	404.8	51,981			
Ontario	644.4	95,101			

Table 15

Summary of Significant Findings

Summary of Significant Findings
1. The concept of rurality took on different meanings across the state. Informants appeared more likely to refer to another place as rural if they lived or worked in a more highly populated area, while those living in rural areas were less likely to make the distinction. Rurality was identified as a way of life rather than a site on a map or based on population density.
2. Rurality appears to influence the culture and capacity of the organization and frames how staff identify and respond to customer needs. Characteristics of agencies included in the case studies are included in Table 10.
3. It appears that rurality influences service integration in relation to the role of the organizations' culture and capacity, soft skill development of job seekers, services to meet the holistic needs of customers, service delivery, and overcoming barriers specific to rural areas. Issues and strategies related to overcoming issues in rural areas are found in Table 8.
4. The apparent success of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in rural areas documented by some researchers may be attributed to the result of overcoming barriers inherent in rural areas and how they were identified and resolved. The elements of this success may be unrecognized when merely measuring caseload size, earnings, and unemployment rates.
5. After discovering how unique rural areas are and the needs of the customers, it seemed at first there may be very little of this inquiry relevant to a specific rural area, a phenomena for which Kussarow (1991a) and Tickamyer (2000) both caution. However, it seems necessary and possible to identify 'moveable concepts' and 'art forms' within a rural context.
6. Service integration is a means to an end and not an end unto itself. Service integration in rural areas appears to be the result of agencies which recognize they can better meet customer needs by working with other agencies to successfully identify and respond to needs. It seems the lack of infrastructure in rural areas and low population density make it unlikely for any one agency to meet the diverse needs of customers. As a result, agencies pool their resources and expertise to provide an integrated and comprehensive support system that otherwise would not exist. This is consistent with the findings of Kogan (1997), Fletcher (2000), and Sussman (2000) who state that access, expertise, and support can be improved by service integration in rural communities.

7. It appears the type and level of service integration between agencies varies over time and space. A specific initiative, need, or funding strategy may serve to couple four or five agencies for a period of time. At the same time, two or three of those agencies may be coupled with a different group of agencies for another initiative, as described by Weick (1976). What was studied appears to be a very fluid and informal system with multiple permutations and relationships at any given time.

8. Service delivery strategies included colocating services near where customers lived, home visits, at businesses, and at agencies accessible to the largest number of customers. Co-located services were moveable based upon the location of the customers.

9. Despite the level of service integration, it appears there is no county void of saboteurs. It appears necessary to recognize these and other barriers such as competing outcomes and regulations of various agencies and reduce the level of consternation that results. Leadership appears to play a significant role in reducing this consternation.

10. Relationships and commitment with other agencies progress as a means to meet customer needs. Owens' (2000) study reveals information on staff commitment and O'Looney (1993) identified characteristics of staff in rural areas that foster service integration that appears consistent with these findings.

11. Successful and sustained service integration appears to emanate from an agency's culture. It appears that the culture of the organization influences staff behavior and staff influence the factors of service integration. If the culture of the organization is influenced by customer needs and if the most effective way to respond to customer needs is through service integration, service integration is perceived as a valuable component of an agency's culture. Studies by Tickamyer (2000) and Harvey (2000) indicate that customer needs as demonstrated and, or articulated by clients did not influence how staff responded to their needs. Their studies also indicated that motivation and self-esteem are job seeker characteristics important to improve.

12. Staff appear to be the critical element in identifying and responding to customer needs and facilitating service integration. Agencies develop a process to identify their values, outcomes, direction, and capacity as influenced by customer needs, legislation, and other sources, and respond to customer needs within this context. They are the invisible infrastructure in rural areas.

13. The invisible rural infrastructure appears to be built on values, customer needs and resources, and the characteristics of staff who partner with other agencies to maximize their collective capacity to facilitate customer outcomes.

14. This invisible infrastructure, while not built of brick and mortar, represents one of the foundations upon which rural areas have built their success. This is an infrastructure that cuts across initiatives, time, levels of funding, economic well-being, and specific needs of individuals living in rural areas. It is a way of thinking about and responding to change and the needs of customers and those at risk.

15. To simply invest money in a single agency is merely addressing the symptoms of rurality: It is not a cure. To think the infrastructure in rural areas could be so significantly impacted by current funding so as to overcome the barriers of rurality would be short-sighted, if not unrealistic.

16. There are three issues regarding funding. First, small rural agencies do not always have the staff resources to apply for funding and, or implement programs. Secondly, some rural county agencies are prohibited from hiring additional staff. Thirdly, some small rural agencies cannot front large sums of money when grant funding is six to twelve months late. The result is a lack of access to funding and services and limited capacity despite federal appropriations.

17. Providing funding for services to agencies without knowledgeable, motivated staff who are part of a culture and environment that has developed the strategies necessary to be successful in rural areas, may be an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars and may deny customers access to the high quality services they need. The answer appears to be to address issues “one person at a time” through a systemic change in which organizations identify and respond to the needs of people living in rural areas by exhausting and integrating all plausible permutations of resources through strategies known to be effective in their rural community.

18. The good news for the government and taxpayers is the apparent success of the agencies working together is not solely predicated upon funding. The bad news is that you cannot buy what they have. What they have are common values, outcomes, direction, and customers. They have a joint commitment to meet the needs of each customer and for each customer to access the services they need to become independent and sustain self-sufficiency. In order to impact rural areas, it is necessary to invest in organizational change and sustainability.

19. Address the culture of the organization and staff characteristics and successful services and outcomes will result.

Figure 1. All 42 rural counties in New York State were included and participated in the study.

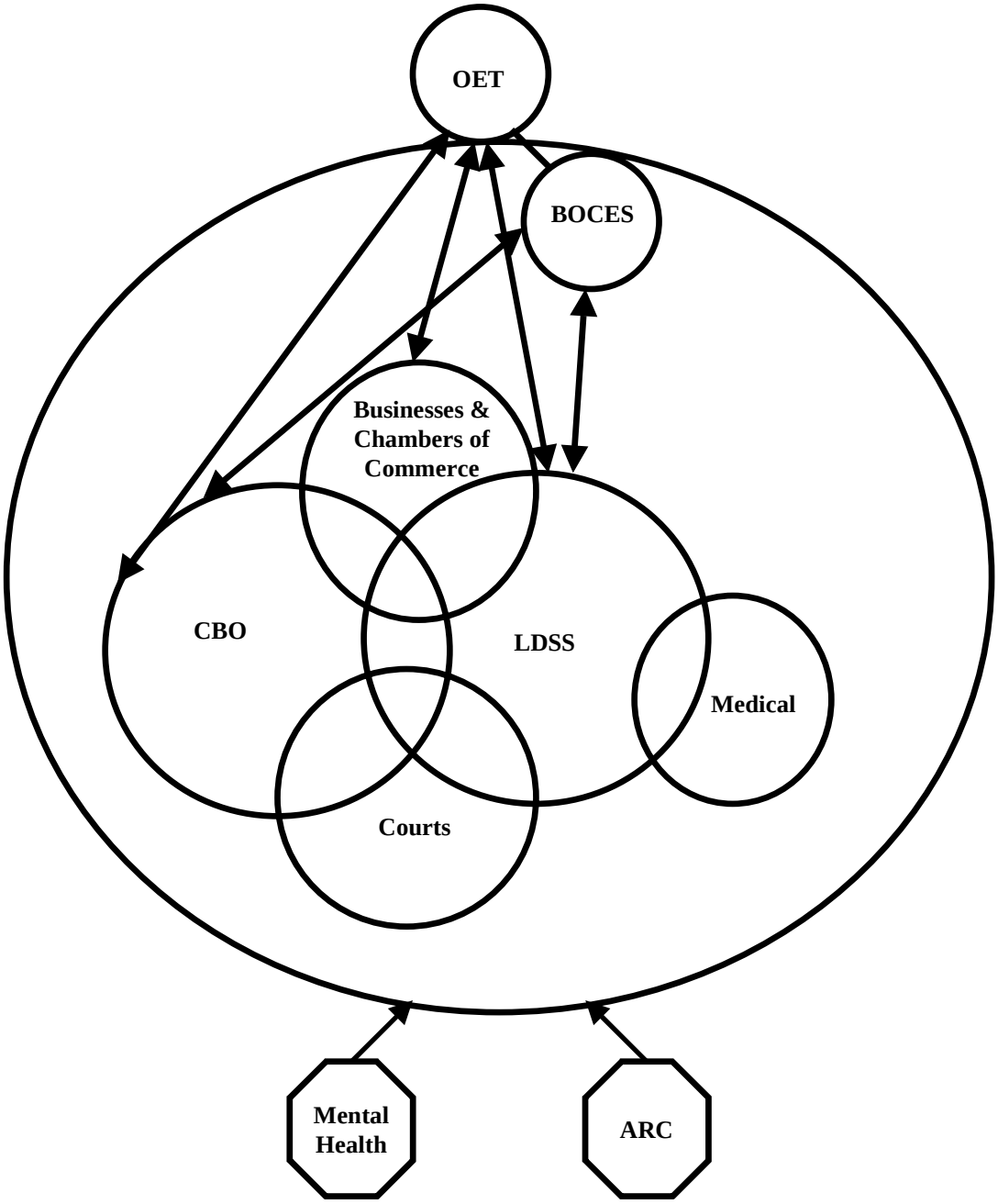

Figure 2. Various relationships exist between providers in County B. It is possible to have a relationship with a saboteur who may not share the same vision and culture but allows staff to work with other agencies. These saboteurs may or may not be connected to the partnership. Relationships with other saboteurs may be completely negative and fall outside of the partnership. It is possible for relationships to have different values and roles contingent upon the activity.

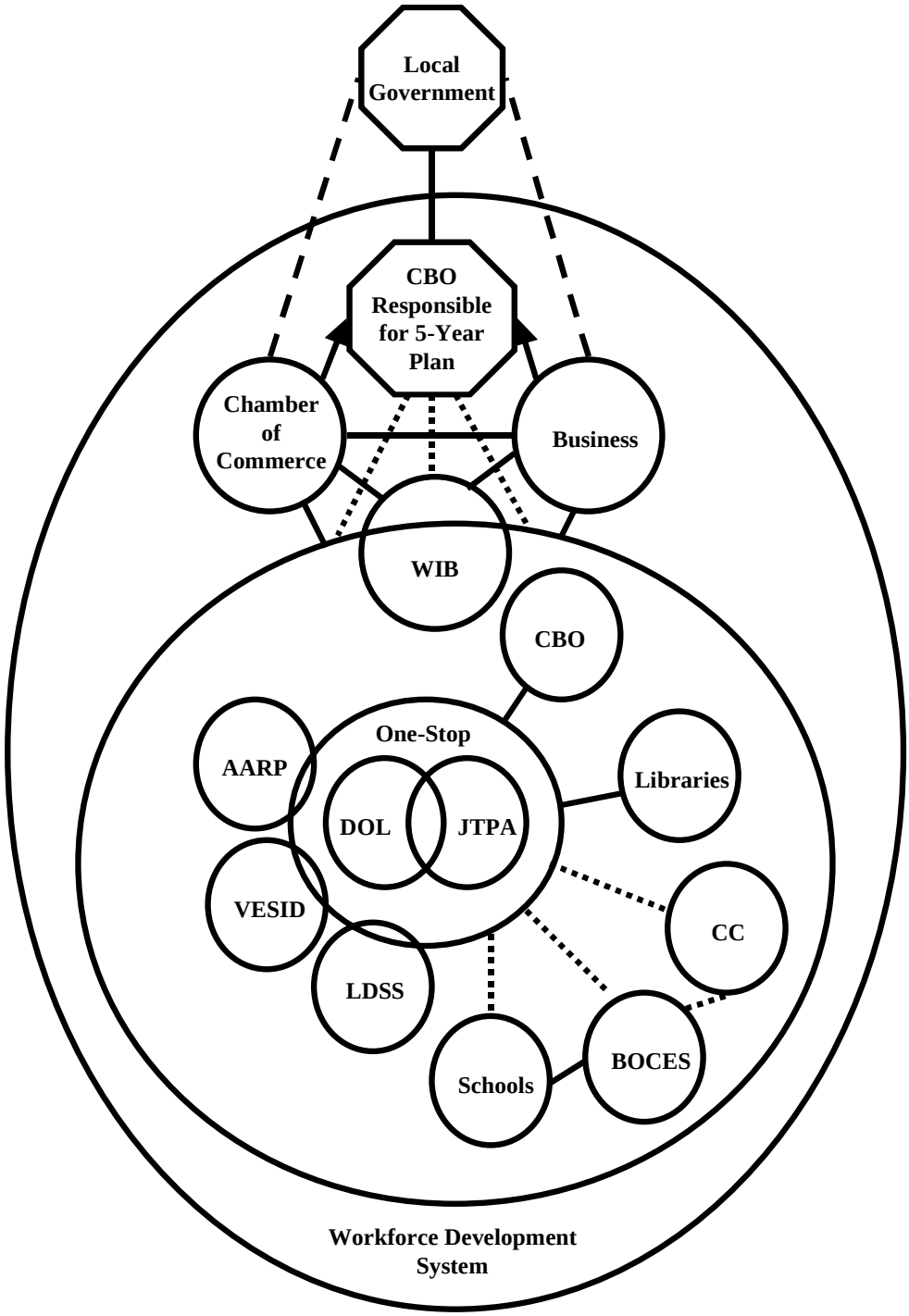

Figure 3. Represented here are relationships between agencies in County A as they are connected to the One-Stop. Solid lines represent strong relationships. Dotted lines represent less formal relationships. Intersecting circles represent colocation.

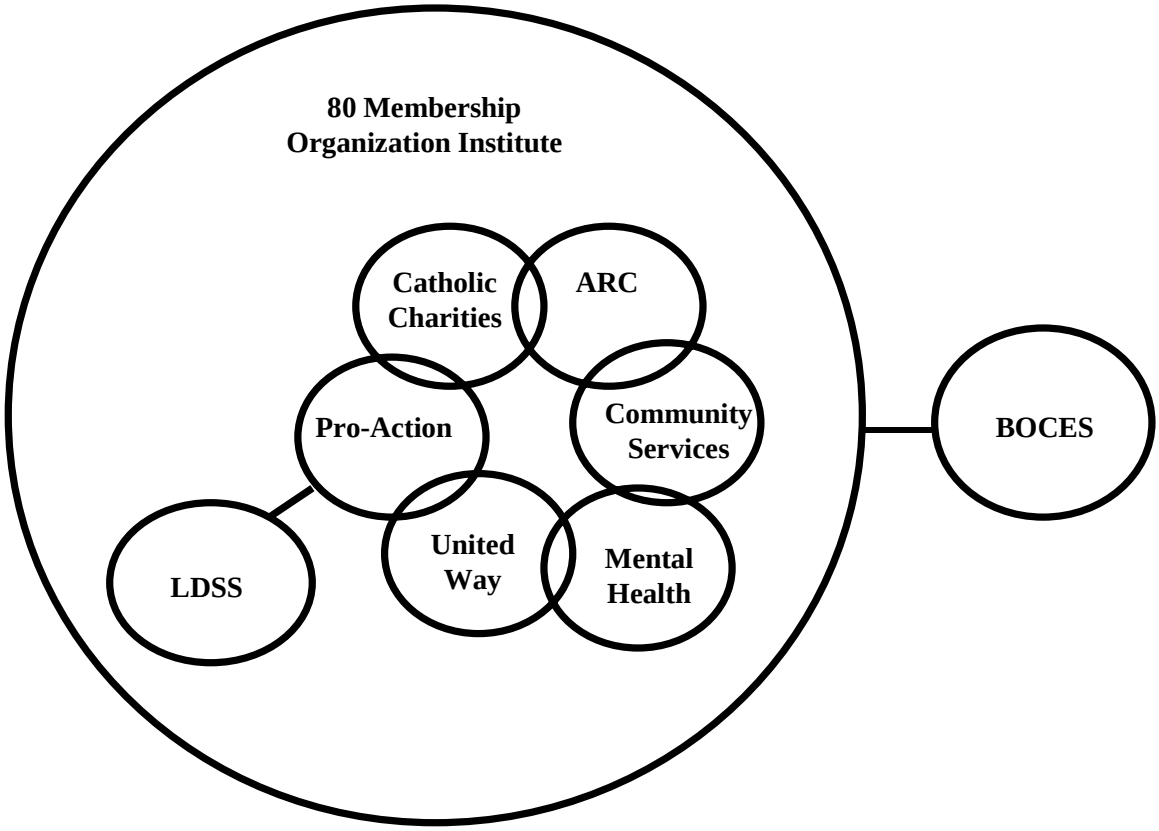

Figure 4. A core of agencies have membership in an institute where a common culture is shared. Even though some agencies cannot finance membership, they are informally linked to the institute.

Figure 5. The first dimension of the rural filter identifies the factors inherent to rural areas.

Figure 6. The second dimension includes strategies that will be successful in rural areas. integration in rural counties of New York State

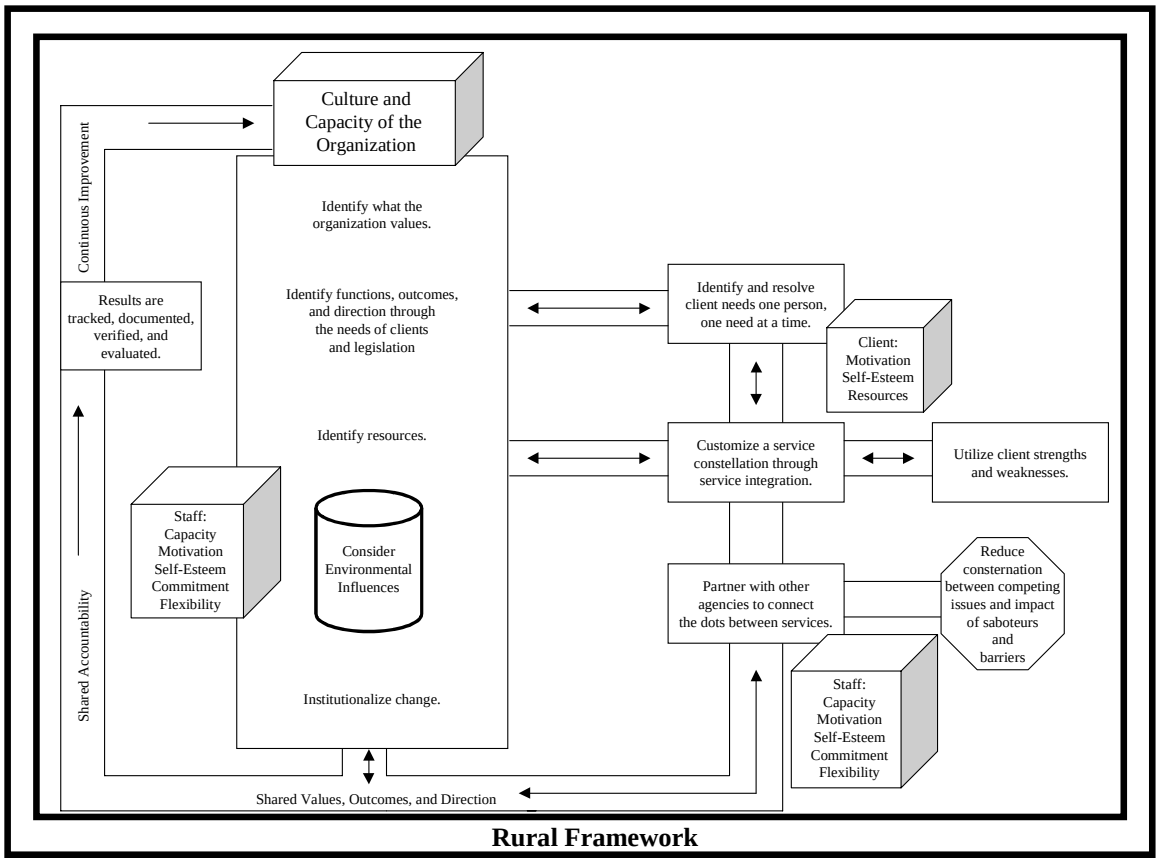

Figure 7. An individual agency identifies their own characteristics first and then strategies for identifying and responding to customer needs: Service coordination was one of those strategies.

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